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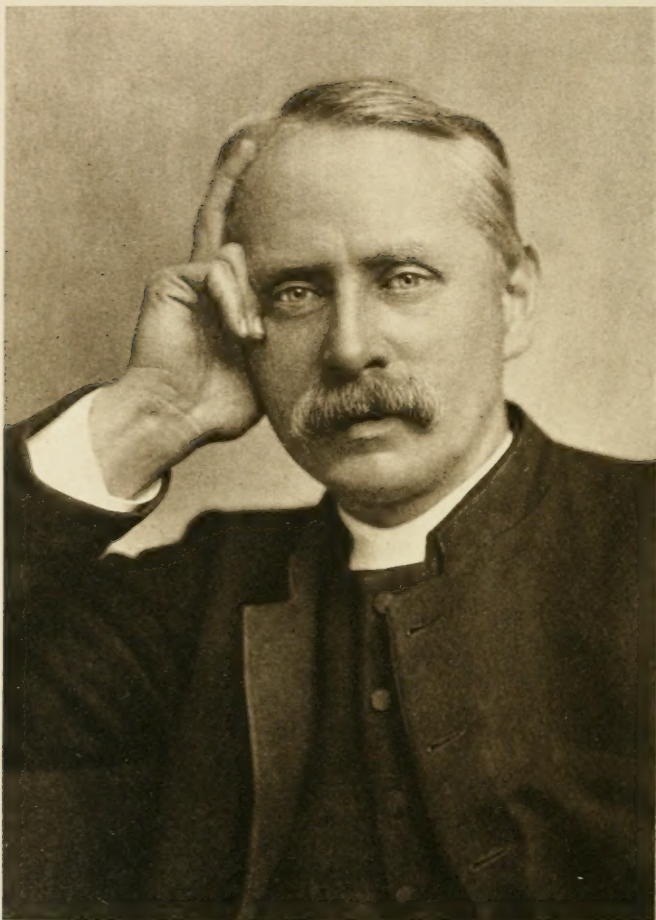


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FAITH AND VERIFICATION



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Yours Sincerely
Cliffitt Jones.

FAITH AND VERIFICATION

WITH OTHER STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN
THOUGHT AND LIFE

BY

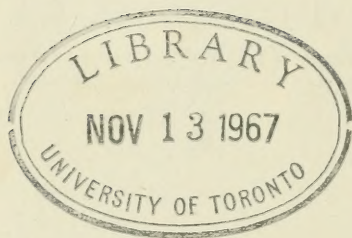
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1907



To

MY FELLOW WORKERS

IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

WHOSE WORK OF FAITH AND LABOUR OF LOVE AND PATIENCE OF
HOPE HAVE BEEN A PERPETUAL ENCOURAGEMENT TO ME
THROUGHOUT THE TWENTY-TWO YEARS OF MY PUBLIC MINISTRY

I GRATEFULLY AND LOVINGLY INSCRIBE

THIS MEMORIAL OF MANY HAPPY HOURS SPENT TOGETHER

AT THE FEET OF THE MASTER

PREFACE

THE substance of the studies included in this volume was delivered from the pulpit in the ordinary course of my ministry at Balham during the past two or three years. They are published very much as they were spoken, and as such bear abundant marks of the "oral" method. Had time and opportunity permitted, they would have been rewritten and somewhat condensed; but as that was found impossible, they are sent forth with any such minor emendations in detail as were found practicable. The book thus makes no pretence to artistic finish, and appeals for an indulgent standard of literary judgment. Possibly, however, what it loses in elegance and brevity, it will gain in directness of appeal to the general reader. The occasional involuntary repetitions in thought and phrase will also, from this point of view, not be altogether a disadvantage.

The range of thought is not exhaustive of any department of doctrine, and makes no claim to systematic thoroughness. At the same time, the topics selected will all be found broadly related to the title of the volume in that they aim at combining the ideal with the practical side of Christian experience. Many of the earlier chapters are coloured, and in a measure determined in treatment, by the recent controversy arising out of the New Theology movement which called them

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forth in the first instance. These will be found useful not so much as a definite contribution to that controversy as in suggesting the writer's point of view, which, while it is in hearty sympathy with the progressive movement in theology, is far removed from that taken up by those who profess to be able to "restate the essential doctrines of our Faith in terms of the Divine Immanence"—a task which he believes to be utterly futile and distinctly mischievous. The later subjects were chosen out of many others because they possess a general unity of character, and aim at elucidating some pressing spiritual problems, and at presenting certain needful sources of inspiration for present day religious life. The writer may be permitted to add that he has included only such discourses as were found specially helpful to individual hearers, and as such, he ventures to hope, they will be of some benefit to a wider public.

E. GRIFFITH-JONES.

BRADFORD,
August, 1907.

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I

FAITH AND VERIFICATION

“Now faith is the giving substance to things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.”—HEB. xi. 1 (R.V. *margin*).

IN analysing the powers and aptitudes of our complex human nature, the current text-books of psychology are silent on a question which once greatly interested the students of that perplexing science—by what means do we come into relation with the great underlying spiritual principle of the universe? Have we an organ of vision into the Unseen as we have into the material world? Is there a religious faculty, or sense, or aptitude, as there is for the appreciation of colour, and music, and physical beauty? What is the bridge that spans the gap between the finite and the Infinite, between God and man? How do we *become aware* of Him “in whom we live and move and have our being”?

The answer to these questions depends vitally, of course, on our attitude towards the object of religious knowledge. There are those who deny the competency of any human “faculty” to come into any kind of relation with the Infinite, and for them the question becomes an idle one. Those, on the other hand, who believe in the presence and knowableness of God will differ, according to their special standpoint, as to the structure of the human personality, and its relation to the Divine. It may, however, be said that as the older and more

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mechanical systems of psychology, which mapped out the mind into compartments and faculties, have now been given up in favour of that which recognises, and emphasises, the essential unity of the Ego, the question with which we started is a little misleading. Religion is not a "special sense," differentiated from other senses, as hearing is differentiated from vision, or from taste; it is the communion of the soul in its entirety with God: it is the fellowship of undivided spirit with Spirit. Unless we localise the Divine, therefore, and identify its personal activity with some of its special forms, we must believe that as God's presence and power are everywhere, we become aware of Him—if at all—through every avenue of sense, and every operation of mind, and all outgoings of will and activity. Religion is, then, the total response of the soul to the total pressure and appeal of its spiritual environment.

And yet it is convenient to give a name to that special attitude of our nature in virtue of which we make this spiritual response. Without speaking of the religious "sense" as we do of the physical senses, which have their special organs, and their sharply contrasted forms of consciousness, we must somehow distinguish between those who do not consciously respond at all to the Divine appeal, and those to whom religion is the supreme and overmastering fact of life. And while further we point out that the sensitive centre of this capacity for response is to be found in the deeps of our common ethical nature, whence its tentacles and fibres radiate out to the furthest circumference of our conscious life, it is convenient and

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helpful to give a name to the particular activity of the soul which brings it into conscious relation with the unseen Fountain of all spiritual experience and life.

In the New Testament the name for this religious attitude, or act, or temper, is *Faith*, and the characteristics of faith are suggested with special vividness and power in this chapter; first in words that give us a general description of its operations, and then in examples which show us its concrete embodiments and results in many forms and aspects. I say description rather than logical definition, because the New Testament is not a text-book of spiritual psychology, but a many-coloured series of pictures of spiritual life in the concrete, and therefore we must not expect to find any of the great religious realities defined in it. But it is full of illuminating descriptions and instances, of flashes of insight, of words and sentences that throw light on the soul's spiritual recesses, so that we can read our hearts here as in no other book. And if we desire to study the soul when in the temper of faith, we shall find ample material in this splendid chapter.

This passage, for instance, presents us with three functions of faith as regards religious life. First, there is *that form of faith that grasps or recognises spiritual realities*. For this I go down to the sixth verse, where the writer says: "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him." Secondly, in our text, there is the *type of faith that tests spiritual realities*, "faith is the *proving* of things not seen." And thirdly, there is that highest of all forms of faith which *substantiates* spiritual realities,

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taking the hopes and ideals of the soul, as they are recognised and held in its inner life, and substantiating or giving recognisable expression and form to them in practical life—"faith is the giving substance to things hoped for." *Faith passive*—the mood in which the soul allows spiritual reality to imprint itself on its sensitive nature, as on a mirror, or rather to feed its roots as the environment of a plant enriches its life; *faith active*—that in which the soul appropriates this felt reality, and co-ordinates it into the conscious fabric of its being; *faith creative*—that which, realising and ordering the ideals of the spiritual order, turns these visions and dreams of insight into facts of character and history. These are the three great operations of the soul in its religious experience; these are the functions of what in the New Testament and in our normal spiritual life we call faith. In all these manifestations and operations the soul is yet one and indivisible: it acts not in compartments, but as a whole. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that they are not so much separate operations as gradually expanding stages of an ever-enriching experience, corresponding on the religious side to the three great aspects of sensibility, intellect, and will, which meet us in all the systems of psychology which attempt to give an ordered account of our conscious being.

I

First, then, a few words about the initial function or operation of faith—that which brings to us a *sense of the existence and reality of the great spiritual world.*

The older psychology which dealt with our conscious

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life as though it were the sum total of the Ego has now become finally discredited. During the last quarter of a century there has been a remarkable expansion of our thought concerning the "self," no less, in a sense, than the discovery of another hemisphere in our being—that undefined area of our inner life which lies beyond and beneath the little circle of conscious light and feeling, and which is called the "sub-conscious Ego." It may be said that no more epoch-making advance has been made in the science of mind since the time of Aristotle. Prophetic hints of this vague and indeterminate but very real area of being have been given in the writings of the mystics, Pagan and Christian; but no formal recognition had been given of its existence in the science of experience as such till quite recently. The phenomena which finally led to its clear realisation had of course always been there; but they were either ignored by philosophers or treated as abnormal disturbances of the ordinary consciousness, and so set aside as having no special significance. At last, however, it was felt that this was to do injustice to real and all-important facts in our inner life. "The philosophy of 6,000 years," writes Emerson, in his essay on the *Oversoul*, "has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there is and has always remained in the last analysis a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending into us we know not whence. I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine." . . . "We lie open on one side to the

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deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God." This hint has, during the last thirty years, been worked out by various experimenters in the science of mind, and especially by that resolute and open-minded band of scientific explorers who founded the epoch-making Society for Psychical Research, who have shown in a way that can no longer be ignored, that there is a great deal more in the experience of every man than he can see and know of himself by ordinary methods of self-examination. Consciousness is not a sun shining on a planet, which in turn presents itself wholly to its view; it is rather a dim lamp held by uncertain hands, and followed by a groping foot, in a winding cavern, which here opens to the starlight, and yonder yawns into deep abysses, where we catch faint glimpses of the sheer precipices and unplumbed depths of the soul. Consciousness, in a word, never illumines more than a fragment of the tremendous whole of the Ego; and there are ranges of our inner being that it never makes directly known to us. We can only, as it were, see a dim line of breakers on a lonely shore. Perhaps it is well that we can never know all that is in us. There is no doubt, at least, that solitude is so repugnant to most men, because of the sense they have of the immensity and the awfulness of the world within.

Now it is here that we come on the tentacles and filaments of the religious "faculty"; it is here that we really meet with God, whose still vaster life encompasses ours; for here it is that we realise how—

"Round our incompleteness flows God's great completeness,
Round our restlessness His rest."

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Faith is that act of the soul in which it apprehends, feels, realises this region of the Divine. It throws one exploring tentacle into this inner world, "feeling after God if haply it may find Him"; and it throws another tentacle into the world without, seeking "Him who is not far from any one of us." The pressure of events, the rush and struggle of human affairs, the absorption of our life in the trivial but insistent cares of the world, often paralyse the activity of the soul as it seeks the "Great Companion"; but in the pauses of our toil and our welfare, like the sound of a great sea breaking upon a sudden silence, He comes back upon us and claims us for His own.

"Hence in a season of calm weather,
Tho' inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear its mighty waters rolling evermore."

This then is the realising faculty or function of faith. It brings us into a more or less conscious and helpful relation to the source of our life, whether in the deeps of our own being, where He mingles with us in a fellowship too often ignored on our side, or in the outer universe which is the fruit of His creative activity, out of whose wealth of order and beauty He appeals to us. For it is through faith that we "understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God; so that things which are seen are not made of things that do appear." In moments of deep emotion, in hours of high exaltation, the ordinary limits of consciousness

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are expanded ; we seem to breathe an ampler air, to see dimly the outlines of a grander order hidden from us in the common hours and days of our experience ; and we feel that " we are nothing, but God is all." In this mood of " wise passivity " into which all men probably fall at times, and in which some of the greatest souls live almost habitually, we find the germ of mysticism. Here is the open door through which the prophet " receives " his revelation, and the poet his inspirations, and the pious and good of all ages realise their utter dependency on the ever-flowing ethereal stream of Divine life and love which enfolds and environs the soul, " as the earth lies enswathed in the soft arms of the atmosphere." Meditation and prayer are the normal channels along which our sense of this deeper Reality, out of which all things proceed, which is the matrix in which the soul is vitalised, nourished and enriched. But, as already suggested, it often breaks into our ordinary consciousness, like light through a cranny, and we are suddenly transported into the Eternal Presence, and feel that " every common bush is afire with God." By any and all means in our power it is our duty to quicken this—too often—dormant spiritual sensitiveness, and to turn what is usually but the flash of a moment into the light of an enduring experience.

This " passive " function of our religious nature, however, has its real and, if not guarded against, its mortal dangers. It has always been the peril of mysticism that its votaries are often little more than useless visionaries ; its rhapsodies tend to degenerate into senseless vapourings or an unintelligible theosophy ;

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its piety lapses into a mere indulgence in useless and exhausting ebullitions of feeling. The *Nirvana* of Buddhism is but the *reductio ad absurdum* of this mood of religious passivity, in which the very love of life is merged into a morbid longing for absorption into the infinite sea of being out of which we spring. The religion of feeling is no final goal for the healthy soul; the receptive element in religion must be balanced by a more active and vigorous exercise of the spiritual personality; its vague experience must be sharpened into definiteness and disposed into ordered channels of thought and action.

The religion of the New Testament clearly recognises this peril, and provides against it by showing that the passive element in faith is only a part of its function. In other words, the spiritual aptitudes of the soul include an instrument of criticism as well as an organ of realisation.

II

We thus pass on to deal briefly with the *verifying function of faith*.

The Apostle here tells us that faith is the “*proving of things not seen*.” By this is meant not the logical faculty, in virtue of which we reason our way to logical conclusions, but the experimental faculty, which tries and tests the reality of things.

There is a saying of Professor Huxley which will make clear what I mean. Somewhere in his essays he writes: “Theology claims that the just shall live by faith: science says the just shall live by verification.” Now here this

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acute thinker gives a clear proof that he did not in the least understand the meaning of this great New Testament word—*Faith*. He confounded it with *credulity*, that tendency by which we accept a thing on trust without making any attempt to find out if it is true. Faith, on the other hand, in the true sense, is the faculty by which we take a thing on trust *in order to find out if it is true*. It is the basis of all religious experiment, the background of all moral effort, the standing-place of the soul in its leap towards God.

Leaving a broader application of this principle to the next chapter, let me here content myself with its special bearing on the point at issue. We hold that the passive attitude of the soul provides us with a sense of the reality of the spiritual world, and with such a realisation of its power and resources that we can venture to build our conscious life and conduct with confidence upon them as upon a sure foundation. First, we lean on the experience of God's being and presence in our innermost being, and in the world around us. Then, we exercise our best faculties to define, delimit, and test the application of this experience in the fields of conduct and experiment.

And this, we claim, is but another and forward step in the exercise of the function of religious faith according to the historic revelation of the Gospel of Grace. Jesus Christ comes to us first of all with an appeal for our absolute and unquestioning trust. "Believest thou that I can do this?" is the necessary preliminary to the act of healing that He performs on the soul. Unless we give Him this trust, unless we make the

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grand venture of faith, and cast ourselves on His promise, He can do nothing for us. It is not that He will not, but He cannot. For only so can we verify His claim, and enter on His promise, and fit ourselves for His reward. Hold back one fraction of your faith in Him, and in so far as you do so, you disqualify yourself from the blessing of His salvation. Give yourself wholly to Him, on the other hand, accept His commission, fulfil His word, grow busy in His service, and the reward is sure. "He that willeth to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine."

This is no appeal to our credulity, it is no attempt to imprison the soul in its quest for truth and reality: it is the essential condition of all spiritual verification. Our Lord and Master is willing to abide by the result of every true act of faith. Only, our attitude must be a whole-hearted one, a willing one: it must be one that carries the whole assent and consent of our nature. The call of the Christian faith is this: "Put my claims to the test, but remember, you cannot do so unless your test follows the law of all healthy experiment, which is that you must venture your all on the issue." And there is no valid objection that can be brought against this claim. "By their fruits shall ye know them." It is only through faith that a man can possibly be justified in religion, as in science and practical life.

Nor is this exercise of the principle of faith in the least incompatible with the fullest use of our intellectual faculties on the subject-matter of religion. The genuine believer will not, cannot, consistently hold

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back the tide of criticism from searching into the very foundations of his creed. Unwillingness to join in this process argues not faith, but a subtle doubt—doubt, that is, lest the realities of faith might dissolve and vanish into nothingness in the alembic of critical thought. Those who thus defend their faith against the principle of criticism thereby prove that at heart they are not believers but sceptics. It would be well if religious thinkers were to act with the same confidence as the scientific in their special departments. No one attempts to hinder any one from enquiring to his fullest bent into the constitution of matter. Why? Because we know that no examination into the constituents and behaviour of the material world will endanger our sense of its practical reality. On the other hand, we all feel assured that the closest scrutiny, the most laboured inquiry into the character and behaviour of the physical universe will end not in the dissipation of matter, but in its better comprehension and its fuller mastery. Why should it be otherwise with the deeper realities that appeal to our spiritual nature? A true-hearted enquiry into the substance and core of religion cannot possibly result in dissolving its realities into mist and nothingness, but in their truer understanding, and in a surer realisation of the distinction between what is absolute and relative, eternal and temporal. True, there are special perils in this process, but our attention should be directed not against the process itself, but against these perils that are involved in it. What is needed perhaps more than anything else in theology to-day is a thorough criticism

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of the methods of criticism, so that the mind may be properly equipped for its special task and safeguarded from the many pitfalls, ethical and intellectual, that waylay the religious as distinguished from the physical enquirer. If the energies of those who still rail against all criticism as an essentially destructive process were directed to this question instead, it would greatly further the arrival of unity and progress in religious thought. And the first condition of so doing is a thorough and whole-hearted faith in the immovable realities on which faith rests and with which it has to do. The deeper our faith in our religion, the more eager we shall be to submit its experiences to the test and experiment of both criticism and life.

III

But there is still another and crowning function to be fulfilled by religious faith—the *Creative*. There is a faith, that is, which grasps the existence and appropriates the substance of spiritual realities; there is a faith that tests, tries, and verifies them; and there is a faith that enriches that reality, *i.e.*, which turns into concrete fact what at first it can only apprehend as an *ideal*. As it is finely put here—"faith is the giving substance to things hoped for." And if the first function of faith corresponds broadly to our sensitive nature, and the second to our intellectual judgment, we here come upon the proper, normative action of the will.

Or, to put the same truths in another form, we here emphasise the fact that religion deals not only with the actualities of life, but specially and pre-eminently

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with its possibilities. In the spiritual as in the material world there is a vast region of fact. But in the material world we can neither create nor destroy a particle of matter; while in the spiritual the power has been delegated to us to enlarge and enrich the area of reality by the exercise of our ethically active nature. The practical scientist can only re-arrange the relationships of matter; he can only, in Sir Oliver Lodge's vivid phrase, "move things about"; the sum-total of matter and force are for ever the same. But in the spiritual region each free conscious will is a fresh centre of activity, for good or evil. By our spiritual conduct we create or we lessen the sum-total of good influences in the cosmos. Religion aims at the realisation of this possibility on the side of goodness; it is the power which "makes for righteousness;" it is the life whereby we turn spiritual possibilities into actual concrete realities.

In "The Will to Believe," Professor William James gives a vivid presentation of this aspect of will-power. He shows how vast and all-important is the region of the *may-be* in human life, and how the problem of conduct is to turn desirable *may-be's* into actual realities. "Suppose, for example," he says, "that I am climbing in the Alps, and have had the ill-luck to work myself into a position from which the only escape is by a terrible leap. But without a similar experience I have no evidence of my ability to perform it successfully; but hope and confidence in myself make me sure I shall not miss my aim, and nerve my feet to execute what without these subjective emotions would perhaps

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be impossible. But suppose that, on the contrary, the emotions of fear and mistrust preponderate, or suppose that, having just read the 'Ethics of Belief,' I feel it would be sinful to act upon an assumption unverified by previous experience—why, then I shall hesitate so long at last, till exhausted and trembling, and launching myself in a moment of despair, I miss my foothold and fall into the abyss. In this case (and it is one of an immense class), belief is one of the indispensable preliminary conditions of the realisation of its object. *There are then cases where faith creates its own verification.* Believe, and you shall be right, for you shall save yourself; doubt, and you shall again be right, for you shall perish. The only difference is that to believe is greatly to your advantage."¹

This vivid illustration puts us in possession of a situation which constantly recurs in the spiritual experience of mankind. In the highest region of conduct faith creates its facts. Life, beforehand, presents us with a whole circle of unrealised possibilities; they surround us on all sides with their clamorous invitation; each, good or bad, cries out to us, "Realise me, turn this supposition into an act; bring down that ideal which floats before you as a vision, and transform it into a reality." And faith is what enables us to do this. We trust that we may do, we believe that we may ourselves become what we believe in.

It is not too much to say that every noble achievement in character, every forward step in social progress, every redemptive movement in religion, is the fruit of

¹ "The Will to Believe," p. 96.

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this creative faith. We have but to turn to the chapter of which our text is at once the opening sentence and the keynote, to see a splendid exemplification of the principle. It presents us with a gallery of portraits as diverse and miscellaneous as you can find in history. Here are warriors, husbandmen, leaders, legislators, poets, prophets, patriots, drawn from a long national history through many centuries. But there is one unifying principle in all their lives and characters. They are men who conceived, or rather who were possessed by, the ideal, and who in a long succession of heroic lives helped to carry that ideal into fact. They were pilgrims and sojourners on earth; they had no abiding city here; they saw the promise faintly, afar off; not one of them achieved his purpose, or gained his end; they all died "having had witness borne to them through their faith," but "not having received the promise." But they helped to turn that promise into fact; each adding a tiny stone or fragment to the unfinished pile of the Divine purpose: till at last the great temple of the perfected humanity was achieved in Christ, and the finial was laid on the topmost spire of the sanctuary of redemption.

Let your eye travel down through the centuries and you will see how the same splendid process was continued. Slowly the ideals that have successively presented themselves to the elect of God, grasped by faith as ideals at first, were finally realised by will as facts. This is the history of every great progressive movement. There is first the prophetic mind that sees the ideal, grasps it firmly, and then passes it on to the enthusiast

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to materialise it. He in turn receives it into the prepared soil of his faith-filled heart, and preaches it to his fellows year in and year out. At first he is like a voice crying in a desert, but slowly a little company of believers is gathered who undertake the hard, strenuous, but glorious task of realising it in fact. Finally the little one becomes a thousand, the tiny band a vast army; there is the shock of battle, and the cry of victory: and so the thing *gets done*.

And this is the story of every true man's religious life. That life is just the turning of his ideals into facts. He first believes them with all his heart: then he sets about realising them with all his might. Faith first gives wings to his ideals, then it gives them body and feet and hands; and so the angelic becomes the human: the Divine purpose incarnates itself anew in flesh and blood.

And this is the saving faith of the gospel. It is not a mere sentiment; not a spiritual indulgence; not a dreamy brooding over possibilities. It is the outgoing of the soul first towards God, and it is the soul's return from God in His strength to fulfil His will, and to obey His commandments. Thus, right throughout experience, it is faith that is the inspiring, controlling, realising principle of the religious life. "The just shall *live* by faith."

II

THE EFFICACY OF FAITH

“ And without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto Him.”—
HEB. xi. 6.

THERE are those who find in this text a difficulty, as though it were an arbitrary statement and not the enunciation of a spiritual law. *Why* should faith be a condition of being well pleasing to God? If faith means belief in the central doctrines of the true religion, it is not the first but the last achievement of many minds. The trouble, in the view of such objectors, is that it is hard to believe in these things; they feel that faith is the goal, not the starting-point of their spiritual life. Yet here it is put at the beginning of their approach to God; it is the door through which alone access is obtainable to His presence and favour. “ Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him: for he that cometh unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after Him.”

We shall arrive at the right point of view by putting the case a little differently. First, let us remember, that in the necessity of things what is well pleasing to God is what is desirable for men—is that without which they cannot possibly be good at all. You cannot get the effect without the cause; you cannot get inside a building if you lock the door against yourself; you cannot get the benefits of religion without fulfilling the one necessary

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condition which enables you to receive them into your heart. That condition is faith, which in this passage means not a full and complete creed, but a temper or attitude of soul—the seed out of which all the after-fruits of religion can alone spring. And it is at once clear (when you think of it) that you cannot come to God without such a temper as will make it possible for Him to come to you, and to bestow the blessings of His fellowship and grace upon you.

Our subject then is the necessary place of faith—in this sense—in the spiritual life.

I

And in the first place, I think it will be easy to prove that such a temper of trust and confidence as faith implies is a condition not only of religious life *but of all true living*, and especially of that part of our life which depends on our relation to other persons.

It is easy to show that this is so even in that department of life which is usually supposed to afford the greatest contrast to the religious department. Science and religion are by many supposed to be opposed, if not incompatible; the scientific and theological temper are considered to be poles apart. And yet deep down in the scientist's mind there is a profound element of belief or faith. When he approaches a scientific mystery, or sets about making a discovery in the realms of matter, or devotes himself to the perfecting of an invention, there is one thing he feels sure of beforehand—that there is such a thing as truth, and that it is accessible to him who goes about studying it in the right way.

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The universe he feels is a harmonious, self-consistent, rational order ; of this he never for a moment has any doubt whatever ; if he has any doubt it is about himself, and whether he is investigating its laws in the right way ; if he is, then he knows that at last he will arrive at the truth he is seeking. Now if you think of it for a moment, this is faith, and it is faith in its purest form as a postulate, it is something taken for granted as the basis of all enquiry, and without which no scientist would for a moment think of wasting his time in enquiring about anything. More than this, faith in the reasonableness of Nature is in its essence the germ of a faith in God. I suppose that of all modern thinkers Nietzsche, the German philosopher, is the most atheistic in his attitude. Yet this is what he says about the matter : " Everywhere where the spirit of the age works seriously it works without an ideal (for which abstinence from an ideal the popular name is atheism) except that it *wills the truth*. But this will, this ghost of an ideal," he goes on to admit, " is, if you will only believe me, the ascetic ideal of religion itself, under a yet severer, and yet more unearthly guise, denuded yet more completely of all external wrappings ; or, rather, it is not so much the ghost of this ideal as its solid core or kernel." Thus the arch-apostle of atheism confesses that in the very heart of his materialistic creed, there is this ghostly seed, this inner core and kernel of religion ; it is theism, or a belief in God, masquerading under a cloak of unbelief and irreligion. From this point of view, the most atheistic scientist is only a theist in disguise, and trying his utmost to

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hide the fact that so far as he goes he is a believer in God.

But leaving these heights of abstract thinking, come down into the order of practical affairs, and consider what it is that makes human society possible. At once you will see that all social life is built on a firm foundation of faith. Men could have no business dealings with one another without an element of mutual trust and confidence. Before we approach our fellow man at all we must trust him in some measure. You believe that the man with whom you are about to open an account is, in the first place, a real man; even if you have never seen him, you believe that he exists, indeed you *must* believe that he exists, or you would not trouble to write to him. And, in the second place, you believe that he is, or at least may be, ready to open business relations with you; on the mere chance of this you are prepared to go to considerable trouble and expense beforehand; if you thought there was no such chance, you would never dream of incurring trouble in vain. It is still more so in offering your friendship to anyone. Every such relation is built on a firm, deep foundation of mutual trust and confidence. It is the glory of friendship and of love that they make such large drafts on the bank of faith, which are drawn willingly and gladly, and which are as gladly honoured and returned. We feel, indeed, that the chief benefit of human friendship is the fact that it gives faith in one another so large and perpetual an exercise. It is my joy that my friend trusts me implicitly, ventures his credit on my faithfulness, my devotion, my willingness to help him in any possible way, that I do the

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same by him. Nay, even more than this: we value friendship chiefly because it is so stimulative of a further faith that enriches the soul, and quickens its noblest qualities into life and vigour.

Now what is this but the human counterpart of the truth of my text, where we are told that without faith it is impossible to please God: "for he that cometh to Him must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him"? If scientifically we are bound to believe that truth exists, and that by diligently seeking it we shall find it, how much more are we bound, as the first religious act of the soul, to believe that God *is*, and that by seeking Him we shall find Him? Here is no arbitrary law, no unreasonable demand, but the very condition which must necessarily precede all spiritual success and blessing. And when, moreover, we remember that religion consists in a relation of friendship with God, and that the essence of friendship consists in an outgoing of trust and love, is it not clear that we cannot enjoy the fellowship and friendship of God unless we start with this much at least of faith—that He is, and that He is well-disposed towards us? This is all that the text demands, and it is most reasonable and inevitable that it should be so. You cannot possibly be religious without this substratum of faith.

II

This becomes clearer when we remember further that our religious beliefs or unbeliefs vitally affect our life, and cannot help doing so. To have right religious

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beliefs is, therefore, one of the prime conditions of a noble and happy life.

There is indeed a school of thought, which was a few years ago very influential, of which the chief apostle was Professor Huxley, who said that our religious beliefs have no relation whatever to our conduct. I am not concerned here with the philosophical grounds on which he based this extraordinary statement. Those interested in this matter will find them forcibly dealt with in an article by Mr. Mallock in *The Contemporary Review* for March, 1906. But there is a widespread idea in the world that "creed and conduct," as it is put, "have no necessary relation to one another." The most evangelical beliefs do not always make good men, and there are many good men in the world who do not profess any religious creed at all. It is at least a common "outside" opinion, not only that the Churches, which are presumably upheld by believers, do not possess the monopoly of virtuous people, but that the average morality of the Churches is not noticeably higher than what you will find outside. I do not personally believe that this is so. I believe heartily that the contrary is true. But let us take it as it stands for the moment. Let us concede that there is no appreciable difference between the average professing Christian and the average non-professing but virtuous man of the world, in the standards of conduct they both follow. Does this prove that our beliefs, the contents of our faith, have no relation to conduct? By no means. To begin with, every man's character when he is grown up is the result of all his teachings and

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education from infancy, and it would be very hard indeed to find a respectable member of English society who has not come under the influence of religious beliefs during the formative period of his youth. With the vast majority of people who have given up, or who never had any, relations with Christianity as a creed, there is a background of religious education which has struck its roots into the depths of their nature. Their attitude towards life, its duties, its problems, its ideals, is coloured by the general sentiment and faith of those who had a hand in making them what they are. It is of no use, therefore, holding up such men as Darwin, Huxley, Professor Clifford, and a score of irrefragable agnostics as specimens of what an agnostic creed can produce. They were not produced by agnosticism, but by Christianity, and they did not part from the beliefs of their youth till their principles and their character had taken a permanent form. In order to know what kind of character a godless, atheistic creed will turn out you must go pretty far afield, and the result will probably be not a little startling.

But what of the many who have been reared under, and who continue to be influenced by, the Christian religion, whose conduct is so unworthy of their creed? Of these we can only say that they cannot really believe what they profess. A man's conduct is not the expression of what he professes, but of what he really believes, of what he puts his trust in. I do not mean that a man cannot, in a true sense, be unfaithful to his real creed: his faith, if it is a high one, must at the best run far ahead of his performances; and we all know

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how weak we all are, and how prone to belie our deepest convictions under the stress of severe temptation. But I do mean that all of us in the end tend to become what we are in virtue of the operative beliefs of our life; and therefore it must make all the difference in the world what we really believe or do not believe in our heart of hearts.

For instance, can any one hold that it makes no difference to a man whether he believes that behind and above and within all things there is an infinitely wise, holy, and loving Spirit, to whom he is personally responsible, and who will judge him, and settle his destiny for ever, according to the inner quality and character of his life? Is there no power in such a thought as this, granted that it is sincerely held, to purify a man's whole nature, to encourage him in all that is good, to restrain him from all that is evil? Again, can it make no difference to any weak and erring soul whether he believes that such a Being is accessible to his cry for help in temptation, disappointment, and sorrow? Are we men and women alone in this universe in striving after the ideal holiness, in fighting with sin, in overcoming pain and defeat? Are we surrounded by an infinite loneliness in our higher life—or is there a warm, cherishing, stimulating Presence, in whom we live and move and have our being, whose help we can draw upon for our encouragement and our victory in this struggle? It is inconceivable to me but that this faith, or the lack of it, must have a tremendous influence for good or for evil on our inner attitude and on our outward conduct. Or, again, can

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it, does it, make no difference to us whether we believe that death ends all our efforts and strivings, that there is no future life of weal or woe, the nature of which depends on our own life here? Is death the sheer precipice behind which all life drops into nothingness, or is it a dark veil behind which a dim but sure vista opens before us of another and higher destiny, in which our unfulfilled purposes in life, and our half-realised ideals, will be brought to fruition, in which the evil which we pursue here will be brought home to us with inevitable judgment? Such questions have only to be put to be answered. It is impossible but that our beliefs, hopes, fears, regarding these things should have a vital influence on us here and now, should ennoble or dwarf our character, should help to make us or mar us as spiritual beings. It may be, of course, that our attitude towards such unseen realities is shot through and through with doubts and uncertainties; we may not have any clear ideas about them; possibly too rigid a definition of any of them is not desirable, because it would not be honest. But our life must in the end go on the assumption that God is, or that He is not; that He does help us to realise our true selves, or that He does not; that there is a future life, or that there is not; that He can, if we trust Him, save us to eternal life, or that He cannot. When all the waverings of our thoughts and the uncertainties of our will about these mysteries are allowed for, the balance must lean on the one side or the other; and according to which side the balance turns will be the loftiness or the pettiness of our life in the end.

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III

And so, to come back to the vital point from which we started, it is clear that our attitude towards God, and His attitude towards us, must be determined in the end by this condition—whether we have that minimum of faith in Him which is spoken of here. We must believe that He is, and that He rewards those that diligently seek Him. It is the one necessary condition of opening conscious relations with Him. It does not mean that God is indifferent or hostile towards those who lack this element of faith. He is good to them; sustains them; causes His sun to rise and His rain to fall on them; maintains the order of Nature as truly in their interests as in the interests of those who turn to Him with a heart full of friendship and trust. But it does mean that they must miss the benefits of His companionship and love in the highest sense. There can be no flow and re-flow of conscious fellowship between Him and us unless our hearts are open to His spirit, unless we are responsive to His presence, unless we give Him our faith and trust as He gives us the ministries of His grace. And therefore we cannot but see how essential faith is to life, and how impossible it is for any man to rise to the fulness of his stature and into victory over sin and evil who has not so much faith as will open the door of divine intercourse and help. Such faith fills life's loneliness with the highest fellowship, helps us to bear our burdens with courage, to fight our spiritual battles with hopefulness, and to look forward to the inevitable end with confidence and a peaceful heart.

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“All great nations,” it has been well said, “press towards the sea. They desire access to the greater world in order that they may receive merchandise from other countries and send their productions to them. When a man realises that he is a part of the great life of God, then that man gets his seaboard and is content. All the best in him can go out, and all that is in God can come in.” Along this seaboard the argosies of faith sail in and out bearing the unspeakable benefits of heavenly commerce to the soul. The whole spiritual wealth of the universe is brought within our reach in this way: therefore “blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.”

Let us suppose that this island home of ours were to be suddenly cut off from intercourse with the wider world, and that every avenue of commerce and exchange with other countries were to be closed on the plea that in future the nation had determined to be self-sufficient and to depend on its own internal resources for its sustenance: what would happen to us? In a very few weeks the grim spectre of famine would begin to show itself among the community, and in a year or two half the population would die of want. That is what happens spiritually to all men and women who cut themselves off from all intercourse with the unseen world. The soul loses half its nutriment, lives a stunted, starved life, and dwarfs itself within the narrow confines of its material satisfactions. The British Empire is great because it lays the world under contribution for its sustenance, and receives from abroad more than it gives. And so the human soul grows great, not through its self-sufficiency, but its

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dependence. The laden argosies of God's grace fill its harbours with heavenly riches from above, and beyond there is a perpetual interchange of spiritual merchandise. Let us keep our waterways open to this heavenly commerce, and as we freely receive, let us freely give.

III

THE RECIPROCITY OF FAITH

“ Faithful is the saying : For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him ; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him ; if we shall deny Him, He also will deny us ; if we are faithless, He abideth faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”—2 TIM. ii. 11, 12.

THE story is told of Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, that a young lady admirer of a somewhat weak religious temperament once asked him with that air of adoration with which his opinions were listened to by his disciples : “ Master, and what do you think of Jesus Christ ? ” The great man paused and looked at her with his most inscrutable expression ; and then he said, “ My dear girl, it does not matter in the slightest to anyone what I think of Jesus Christ ; but it matters everything *what He thinks of me.*”

I

As a fitting answer to a sentimental and perhaps impertinent question this was no doubt a masterly rejoinder. Nevertheless, the more we consider it the more clear I think it will be seen that there is something wrong with it. Doubtless the final question for all of us is this—“ What does Jesus Christ think of us ? Where do we stand in the balance of His kind but unerring judgment ? ” But does it not matter what we think of Him ? Is there not something mutual in every relationship in life, and especially in the most sacred

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relationship of the soul to its Saviour? I am constrained to believe that there is. It does matter supremely what we think of Jesus Christ as well as what He thinks of us. For what we think of Him will determine in the end what we feel towards Him, what we do with His teaching, His commandments, His offer of salvation and life to us, His demands on our service for His sake. The man who does not *think* aright about Jesus Christ will not live aright in relation to Him.

That Jesus Himself felt this is very evident from a remarkable incident in His earthly life. At a certain period in His ministry He turned to His disciples and asked them: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" It is clear that He was not greatly concerned about the answer to that particular question—the shallow opinions of fickle crowds did not trouble Him very much one way or another. And so when they said: "Some say, John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets," He showed that He was in no way disturbed by such wild and random guesses at the mystery of His identity, from people who had had no adequate chance to know Him. But He followed up His question with another that was evidently deep in His heart, and concerning the answer to which He was deeply anxious: "But who say *ye* that I am?" And when Peter, as the common spokesman, answered and said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," He burst forth into a rhapsody of joy at the swift intuition of the truth that had come to His chosen disciples: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it

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unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Let us carry this thought a step further, into the heart of the subject before us. The thoughts of men are an indication of the bent and tendency of their life. But deeper than thought lie feeling, will, affection. Jesus appeals to us not only for our intellectual assent to His claims, but for the whole response of our nature. And what I wish to emphasise is this, that what He can be to us is determined by what we are willing to be to Him. The benefits He can give us are limited by our attitude towards His offered salvation; the enlightenment He can give us is conditioned by our teachableness to His truth; the attainments to which He can inspire us by the way in which we accept His ideals and His grace; the reward He will give us at last by the wholeheartedness and faithfulness of our service in His name. For the relation we hold to Him is a personal one, and in personal relations *reciprocity is the fundamental law of life.*

II

Let me safeguard my position for a moment. It is the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that it has revealed the generous, undeserved love of God to us. The essence of it is that He does not treat us as we have dealt with Him. His love has survived our rebellion and evil ways. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

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However ill men treat Him, He treats them kindly and well; causing His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sending rain on the just and the unjust; and more than this, sounding the call of pardon and reconciliation to the whole world in spite of its long-continued iniquities and bitter alienation. This is the essence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And it seems to suggest that God in His relation to us acts with a benevolence and grace which work irrespective of our attitude towards Him.

This is all divinely true. None the less is the issue of the Gospel, its power to bless and enrich us, dependent on our response to it. The offer is free, "we are saved by grace." But it is "through faith," and faith on man's side corresponds to grace on God's side—it is the response of the soul to the appeal of love. According to our faith, so shall it be unto us. If we have no faith, there is no grace available for us, however freely and gladly it may be offered; if we have little faith, we shall have little grace; if we have great faith, we shall have large and royal grace to help, to bless and save us. If we do much for Christ, He can do much for us; if we give ourselves freely and fully to Him, He can give Himself freely and fully to us.

III

Let us see how this law works through life—the law of the reciprocal gift.

Nature is an organised invitation to every man to go in and possess her according to his individual capacity. The physical world beats at the door of every sense and

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faculty of the soul, and as each door is opened and each power is exercised, so we are able to take possession of her treasures. If a man is sensitive on the physical side, he is filled with a sense of the sights and sounds of Nature, he joys in what he hears, smells, and sees of her abounding life. When a man like Richard Jefferies, the naturalist, goes out for a country walk, how different the effect on his mind from that of the same walk on a man who is dull to its message! Before he goes a mile he has seen wonderful things; the landscape is alive with messages to his receptive soul; he is walking in an earthly paradise of vital order and beauty. Why? Because he has that in him which communes with Nature as with a friend, and a host of mutual influences pass between the two; he "conspires with the sun and the morning air," and the landscape is a book to him in which he reads the stuff of which poetry, pictures and music are made. So the scientist finds in the common facts that fall dead on the senses of the stupid and unintelligent hints of the universal order; he sees everywhere segments of the wonderful laws that run full circle through the world; he finds hints of forces which constantly suggest to him fresh adjustments and contrivances. Nature gives herself to those who give themselves to her.

Still more is this so in the world of human relationships. Phillips Brooks says in a great sermon: "I think that all of us come to feel very strongly, as we grow older, that what we get from fellow men in all those close and pressing contacts into which life brings us with one another depends not nearly so much upon what men

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are whom we touch, as upon what sort of men we are who touch them; and so as we grow older we ought to grow more careless about where we live, and more careful about what we are. What does it mean that one man cannot go among any kind of men, however base and low, without getting happiness and good; while another man cannot go into the midst of the noblest and sweetest company without bringing out misery and despair and sin? I think there grows in us a strong conviction with our growing fears that for a man to get bad out of the world of fellow men is not a disgrace to them, but is certainly a disgrace to him.”¹ All men and women have some friend who finds something admirable in them, and if we do not find something admirable in all, it is our fault who fail to approach them with the gift of sympathetic insight.

So with books, pictures, and great works of art. If a man has the reading faculty—and it is the few, not the many, who have it—how splendid is the enjoyment, how rich the profit, open to him in the world of thought! If he has it not, you may make him a member of all the lending libraries and of all the reference libraries of the world, and he will be none the better. Those to whom God has given this gift, and who have exercised it well, will know what I mean. Without access to books, much as we love the companionship and friendship of our fellow men, life would be immeasurably poor to us,—a glory would depart from it. With such access, we are made freemen of the city of the great and good, and all the records of

¹ Sermons in English Churches, p. 272.

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their wisdom are thrown open to our vision and given to us for a sure possession.

So is it also with life as a whole. I have lately been dipping into the writings of Schopenhauer, the father of German pessimism; and I have been amazed at the way in which he is able to find food for misanthropy, gloom and despair of life out of the same experiences as those which made Emerson the most confirmed optimist of his day. When William Blake, that queer genius, was asked what he thought of the sunrise, he said, "Some men would see in it only a yellow disk something like a guinea, but I see an innumerable host of angels and archangels crying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." So if we take the right angle towards life, it will be gilded with rainbows to us; if the wrong angle, it will be a canopy of darkness and gloom. Life reveals to us all what we fit ourselves to find in it.

IV

We have but to carry this line of thought a step higher to find light breaking in upon many a dark place in Scripture, and its whole teaching on the question of discipleship taking its rank as the highest wisdom.

We sometimes think that if we had the privilege granted to the contemporaries of Jesus of coming into fresh personal contact with Him, all would be well with us, and every doubt and difficulty would be finally removed from our minds. Yet if we take our stand by His side as He moved among men, we shall see how shallow a notion this is. As He came into contact with men, there was that in Him which forced a response

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from all of them. But it was not the same response from all. His first attitude was the same to all; but all were not the same to Him, and we find that His final attitude towards each man was conditioned by the kind of response which He received from him. The Pharisees reacted on Him in the direction of hatred and rejection, and so incurred at last the woes of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew; the disciples gave Him their love and their homage, and at last they were transformed into His likeness. John the beloved disciple was turned from a son of thunder into the apostle of love; Simon the unstable became Peter the man of rock. But what of Judas? All those years of happy friendship, which quickened and fructified the lives of the others, only turned the moisture of his soul into the drought of summer—nay, the barrenness of winter; while they grew like corn in sunshine under that stimulating influence, he became a worse man every day, and at the last the divine companionship of Jesus only made him the blacker traitor, and plunged him into a deeper hell. The Cross, which to others was a savour of life unto life, was to him a savour of death unto death.

We often hear men asking thoughtlessly: "Why does religion make such slow progress in the world? Why does not the Almighty save it in spite of itself?" And the answer is that without a response, no invitation can be efficient. God cannot make us good by force. He comes to us, but we must also go to Him; He calls, and we must answer; He commands, and we must obey. There is nothing whimsical, or arbitrary, or unjust about the law—"with what measure ye mete

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it shall be measured to you again." In great things, in the greatest things, as well as in small things, it is a necessary, inevitable law of life. Just as it takes two to make a quarrel, so it takes two to make a reconciliation, a friendship, a salvation.

Thus we come back to the Gospel teaching—Christ Jesus has given Himself to us: have we given ourselves to Him? Nothing can exceed the generous giving of the Saviour for humanity and to humanity. All that He is, and has, is ours. On that side there has been a perfect gift, a complete surrender. And now, what are we doing in return? Have we died with Him to sin? Then we shall live with Him in newness and righteousness of life. Do we endure, as seeing Him who is invisible? Then we shall also reign with Him. Do we deny Him in our earthly lives? Then He must deny us in the great life beyond, not from irrational anger and an offended dignity, but because there is no way out of the law that religion is a mutual relation, and each must fulfil his part if the grand issue is to come at last.

What then do we *think* of Jesus Christ? According to our thought of Him, so shall it be to us. Is He to us only the most beautiful life ever lived among men? It is well to have looked on that ideal picture of humanity at its best, for to have seen it is to have caught a glimpse of a world that would otherwise have been completely hidden from us. But if that is all, Jesus is still to us only a Figure in history; He is not our Saviour and Lord. Only as our thoughts become commensurate with His great revelation of God, only

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as we recognise in Him "the express image of His person," will the majesty of His nature dawn on us, and all the doors be open in our hearts for His entrance and benediction.

What do we *feel* for Jesus Christ? The admiration for a far away ideal, homage to a perfect life lived long, long ago? Then we shall only receive a pale reflection of that love into our hearts that pulses through us and around us here and now, that love which, when we let it in as the master passion of our life, will "constrain" us, and make all things possible through the intensity of it, and the power of it, and the joy of it.

And what do we *do* for Jesus Christ? Are we willing to take on us the burden of His service for men, and be witnesses in our day and generation for Him who is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth? Then in proportion as we give our thought, our heart, our energies for His dear sake, so will He be able to give Himself to us, in the reward of a perfect communion, in the crown of a full and victorious life.

Surely, then, it does matter what we think of Jesus Christ, as well as what He thinks of us; how much we love Him, as well as how much He loves us; what we do for Him as well as what He does for us. To those who think of Him worthily, and love Him nobly, and serve Him faithfully in this life shall come, in the after-life, that perfect possession of all that He means to us, and can do for us, which will be the true blessedness of Heaven.

IV

CONTROVERSY AND LIFE

“Notwithstanding, every way . . . Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.”—PHIL. i. 18.

THE ancient picture of St. Paul as a calm and philosophic figure receiving his inspired message from heaven, and writing it down reverently and dispassionately “far from the madding crowd,” finds little warrant from the facts. The revelation of the Gospel came to him not in the calm of a hermit’s cell, but in the heat and tumult of battle. The Churches to which he wrote were born in persecution and cradled in controversy. Christianity at its inception was the centre of a three-fold conflict; it had to face the antagonism of a militant Judaism on the one side, of a moribund but fierce Paganism on another, and of that trinity of evil “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” on the third. St. Paul stood in the centre of these conflicting powers, and directed the fortunes of the Gospel with the clear vision of a statesman, with the burning heart of an enthusiast, with a certain eager combativeness all his own. The joy of battle shines through his impassioned and weighty utterances. He considers himself as set apart not so much for the exposition as for the “defence” of the Gospel. Tremendous forces are surging around him, all bent on the destruction of the faith once delivered unto the saints, and he recognises

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that he is called upon to unfold the truth with unmistakable emphasis, and to apply it with all the vigour of his intellect and all the splendid resources of his personality.

We have, in this passage, a glimpse into his heart at a time when the battle was turning in his favour. He has met and mastered the Judaizing teachers in the Galatian Churches; he has reduced the internal schisms and divisions of the Church into harmony; he has founded Churches at Thessalonica, at Ephesus, at Philippi, and elsewhere, which are strong and healthy; and now, himself a prisoner at Rome, he is able to review the situation and pause in the breathless struggle. Even here he is followed by a certain number of schismatic, self-seeking folk who attempt to interfere with his work and destroy his influence. But by this time Paul has learnt to trust the Gospel which he has preached so long to vindicate itself against the abuses and the errors which dogged its footsteps. Through all these partial, contradictory, antagonistic preachings he sees a divine light shining, and he trusts the light to pierce through much darkness. What earlier in his career would have aroused him to vehement opposition now fills him with joy. For even when, insincerely, imperfectly and erroneously presented, Christ was being preached, His Gospel had in it something regnant, conquering, self-evidencing to all teachable hearts. It lifted their eyes from the sordid worldliness, the filthy vices, the idolatrous cults of the day, and opened out before them an ideal so pure, possibilities so beautiful and fair, a hope so undying, that they could

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safeguard and enjoy, are equally wide of the mark. The thought that repudiates its roots in the past can bear no fruit in the future. For the centuries as well as the days should be "linked each to each in natural piety." If we rightly read the signs of the times, we shall recognise that the winds of God are once more abroad. The spirit is blowing where it listeth. The day has come for a reverent and open-minded re-examination of the foundations and contents of religious belief. Does this involve a situation that is full of anxiety to many? Let us accept loyally the perils as well as the privileges of the times. Let us thank God that we are living in an age when the battle for freedom of thought has been finally won, when men are using their God-given faculties to think about the deepest realities of the universe with a fresh and living intensity. Whatever disturbances and re-statements may be necessitated by this fact, the ultimate consequences will be all for good. Truth is great, and in the end must prevail. Blessed are those who are prepared to follow its gleam with cheery confidence that it will lead at last into a broader light, and not into deepening darkness—into the peace and assurance of a roomier faith, and not into the wilderness of barren unbelief!

II

Meanwhile, a few cautionary considerations are important to bear in mind.

In order that the present controversy may bear its rightful fruit, we must learn something from the spirit and temper of bygone controversies.

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The theological disputes of the past have been almost invariably marred by the spirit of bitterness, and the progress of thought has in consequence been hindered through long and tedious years of strife. Many of the noblest spirits of bygone days, who were called by God to lead the world into more fruitful ways of thought and broader visions of truth, have suffered cruel persecution and martyrdom, and many have died of a broken heart who are now canonised in the grateful memory of all true men. We have the opportunity just now of making a fresh departure in the art of controversy. If only the spirit of schism and divisiveness can be kept out of the Christian Church, this far-spreading discussion will do not harm but good ; it will not retard but advance the progress of truth ; religion will not slacken but deepen its hold on the community. For the moment at least the world's eyes are bent on the Church. Let the Church for once show that she is too loving in heart, too loyal to the spirit of brotherhood, too deeply sensible of her reconciling mission to allow any breach in the wall of her unity, or any failure of charity in the temper of her discussions. Personalities are the bane of religious controversy ; mutual belittlements are suicidal weapons in the hands of those who follow the Lord Jesus, who once said to the wrangling band of His disciples, " One is your Master, even Christ ; and *all* ye are brethren."

There are two or three directions in which this divisive spirit is being shown.

In the first place, there is a tendency among those who represent the forward movement, and who for the

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moment hold the ear of the wider public, to speak with a certain levity of those who deprecate any hasty breach with the past history of religious thought. The professional theologian seems just now to be strangely at a discount. He is represented as out of touch with the spirit of the times. His warnings against a spirit of shallow and heedless innovation in the handling of the sacred themes, to the elucidation of which he has given a lifetime of study, are ruled out of court as though they were the mere vapourings of an obscurantist and discredited officialism. In an age when in every other department of thought the expert holds the field and is listened to as an oracle, it seems taken for granted that the theologian has no place. A great scientist will draw crowds to hear him when he ventures out of his province to deliver his *obiter dicta* on the mysteries of the faith, while the man who has devoted his life for many years to profound thought on the same subject as his chosen field of investigation is scarcely attended to. "The world is not now listening to the theologian." Is this a sign of wisdom or of impatience? The question is not, who is being listened to, but who *ought* to be listened to? I venture to doubt if this startling attitude towards the exponents of theologic thought is just or is likely to continue long. The world will possibly find out presently that in a field so vast, so intricate, so overwhelmingly important, the expert has his place as truly as in the field of physics or biology; and that the sudden contempt into which the theologian has fallen is a sign not so much of his incompetency as of the sciolism and unreasonableness of the age.

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Let us grant freely that theologic thought has in days gone by shown a strange blindness to the fact that the human mind is not standing still, but is ever moving on, and that as all departments of scientific thought have to pass through a recurrent process of reconstruction and mutual articulation in order to attain to the ideal of all fruitful thinking—which is unity and consistency in all its branches—so it must recognise that the same need ever obtains in its own sphere, which is the highest of all the spheres of human activity. But those days are over. There are abundant signs that theology is alive and is thoroughly awakened to its task of reconstruction. The process, indeed, has long since commenced, and it is proceeding at an ever-accelerating pace. And it would be well for the eager spirits who are leading the van in this new movement to pay due regard to the deliverances of those who are veterans in the work, and to avoid the too ready impatience of youth towards the deeper knowledge and broader experience of riper years. For, we may be sure, no advance in religious thought will be permanent that does not carry with it all the garnered wisdom of the ages, and give adequate expression to that vast body of historic truth which must all be accounted for in the coming reconstruction of theologic thought, if it is not to prove illusory and abortive.

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that neither theologic nor scientific experts have any monopoly in the world of religious thought. Youth, with its intuitions, as well as age and experience and wisdom, has its true function to fill in theology. There is room for adventure, and spontaneity, and a daring courage

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any as elsewhere. Professional training can only work on the material provided. It is no substitute for genius—least of all religious genius. Almost all great prophets and seers have been young men, whose fresh vision has come not from the schools, but from the incommunicable touch of God's spirit. If you put the "bar sinister" against the names of those who have ever passed through the schools, and deny their competence to utter a real, and perhaps a revolutionary, message, on the ground that they have had no technical theological training, you may be refusing a divine summons and repudiating a messenger of the Most High God. St. Paul expressly denied the idea that his message had come from men or through men, neither received he it of any man, neither was he taught it, not by the revelation of Jesus Christ. And was it not the plea of those who repudiated the teachings of a seer like St. Paul, that he had never gone through the orthodox schools? "And the Jews marvelled, saying: How knoweth this man letters, having never studied?" And Jesus answered them, and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me." The value of a theological training is incalculable, and it is probably more useful for the fewest than even for the average and as a studying, enriching, correcting, deepening influence. None the less, it is not always indispensable, for God has His own secret school of training for His elect, and He may be speaking to us to-day through many a soul which by the accident of circumstances or early environment has missed the human training, though not the heavenly message. We must be pos-

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pared to receive that message whenever it may come, and give it due place in our hearts if it bears upon it the seal of a divine and unmistakable reality.

There is another caution it would be well to bear in mind at the present crisis. I would plead for a loving and trustful freedom to the pulpit. Those who, with the best intentions, attempt to hamper our preachers in their honest endeavours to deal with the necessities of the present hour in what may be an unconventional spirit, are following a most mischievous policy. The appeal to ancient trust-deeds; petty criticism in the vestry or at church meetings; anonymous deliveries through the post; the formation of parties and counter-parties in the community of believers—how can the truth be helped by such methods as these? All they can do is to weaken the working forces of the Church by destroying its brotherhood. And there is one direction in which irreparable mischief may be done that is little thought of—they will discourage men of honourable and sensitive minds from speaking out the deepest convictions of their hearts, and cause young men who aspire to the ministry to pause well ere they enter a profession thus hampered and crippled by short-sighted opposition from those who should be their loving colleagues. It is significant that these attacks on the freedom of the pulpit almost invariably come from the least informed and least thoughtful quarters.

III

Meanwhile, what shall we say to those who are in no sense of the term experts in religious thought, and

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who cannot hope to take any profitable part in a theologic controversy, but who have their lives to live and their spiritual conflicts and temptations to undergo?

I would say to all who are in this position—and they form the vast majority of the religious public—“Be of good cheer.” Let us not exaggerate the meaning and importance of the present unsettlement. We must carefully distinguish between the spheres of religion and theology. Religion is the reality of which theology is the theory. We think our theology but we live our religion. Just as Nature provides the physical scientist with his facts, which he cannot (and does not wish to) alter, but which it is his business to codify and arrange with a view to understanding their meaning, and realising their value—so the theologian ever depends on the facts of the religious life for his data, and has, in the end, to submit all his theories to the sober test of experience. Now, just as amid all the unsettlements of scientific thought, which is ever in a state of flow and movement, and never reaches finality, the practical man pursues his business unperturbed by the wildest speculations or the fiercest expert controversy, so the religious man can and should maintain his poise amid the wildest storms of theologic thought, knowing that he is at the mercy of no theorist, because his life is in personal and independent touch with the realities of the spiritual world. Is the business man, whose transactions link him with the great common fabric of commerce to the ends of the earth, to wait till economists have adjusted their differences, ere he strikes his bargains

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and fulfils his engagements? If he did, he would soon be bankrupt. Neither should any man pause in his quest for light on the path of duty, and for the grace and power of the Most High in his inner life, till the moot questions of theology are settled. Life must be lived, however deep its mystery, and however difficult it may be to reduce it to system in its intellectual aspects. And religion is life on its highest plane; it is life in its fullest, best and richest quality. Now this highest, richest life is within the reach of every true soul. While, therefore, it is of the utmost ultimate importance to attain to a clear, satisfying and whole-hearted theology, our primary duty is to see that our life is lived in loyal and hearty obedience to the will of God, and under the inspiration of the redeeming love of Christ. If any man, however humble and obscure, however vexed with uncertainty and torn with perplexity, does this with a single mind, he will not long walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Doing the will of God in simplicity, he will in the end find that the key to life's mysteries is not thought but obedience, not theory but practice, and that to him that willeth to do the will of God there shall come a great and enduring peace—the "peace that passeth understanding," which is the gift of Christ to His loving and loyal people."

V

“ IN A MIRROR—DARKLY ”

“ Now we see as in a mirror, darkly.”—I COR. xiii. 12.

ONE of the questions which is being asked just now by many a perplexed soul, tossed to and fro by conflicting winds of doctrine, and filled with a kind of despair at the spectacle of a distracted theological situation, is this: “ Why is it that religious certainty is so difficult to attain ? ” Granted that religion is the highest life of the soul, that the knowledge of God is “ eternal life,” how comes it to pass that while the physical universe is so near and real to us, the spiritual universe is so far and faint ? Why is the eye of the body so clear, and the eye of the soul so dim ? How is it that the science that deals with the material world—the matter with which the spirit of man has only a temporary relation—is so unmistakable in its method, and so easily grasped in its results ; while the science that deals with the spiritual world itself—which is the soul’s true home—is so tentative, so uncertain, so full of perplexity and surmise ? No man doubts the existence of the sun. How comes it that it is possible to doubt the existence of God ? We hear clearly the voices of this lower order. Why are the voices of the spirit so faint and so hard to interpret ? It would seem as though where clearness and certainty are least important for our higher interests, we have it in abundance ; while where

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clearness and certainty are essential for those interests, they are well-nigh impossible to attain. And all the while the great material world presses on us—and our souls are half-stifled by its weight and tyranny—and makes us sometimes feel as though nothing were real but itself. Is it not a natural question, therefore, for us to ask—Why is this ?

Let us look steadily at this problem and see if any light comes to us upon it.

I

On the old theory of human origins—that God created man perfect, and that there was a time in the history of the race when he lived in the full enjoyment of the fellowship and favour of God—there is only one possible explanation of this spiritual dimness of vision and darkness of spiritual life which we inherit. That explanation presupposes a fall from a condition not merely of innocence, but of perfection—a condition of which we can now have no conception. It is sin that has blinded man to the glory of God's presence. If man had not fallen, we should be as sure of His fellowship and favour as we now are of the sun in the sky ; we should be walking in the full "light of life," as Jesus did. As it is, the awful consequences of that spiritual calamity which befel Adam have followed the race from generation to generation ; his sin has involved all his posterity in its painful disablement ; so that the spiritual sense now works in men ineffectively, and is often totally inoperative.

Now, whatever truth may lie in the theory of the

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Fall, with its painful train of hereditary evils, we can no longer believe that our lack of spiritual certainty is altogether due to that fact, for this difficulty of realising spiritual reality is one that afflicts men at their best as well as the worst. The religious sense, while it is present in all men, at least as a latent possibility, never rises above a certain level in the holiest and most virtuous people, even when it is educated and developed to the utmost. Of the saintliest people it is scarcely more than true—that they feel after God, if haply they may find Him. We walk at best by faith, and not by sight :—

“ We faintly hear, we dimly see,
In differing phrase we pray.”

However firmly the *reality* of the spiritual order is impressed on our spiritual consciousness, its *individual character* is so undefined that we have no confidence in speaking of it : there is something vague and vast about its outlines like a glorious sunlit mountain looming through a mist, and while there are moments of exaltation and rapture when the mist lifts a little, it is always there, and it seems to be there by the very constitution of our nature. The effects of sin in hindering and hampering the soul in its quest for God are of course calamitous and awful, but they will not account for the feeling we all have that the dimness of our vision of God is mainly due to the fact that the eye of the soul is imperfect as well as diseased. As the Apostle here puts it, “ Now we see darkly, as in a mirror,”—the fault being with the organ of vision and the reflecting surface rather than the object seen, the light by which we see it.

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Here it is that the theory of evolution, which speaks of man as a creature that has developed from the lower organic kingdoms, comes to our aid. That theory tells us that man on the physical side is the ripe fruit of the tree of life, while spiritually he is a seedling,—a creature in the making. Our bodies, with all their organs, and their special senses, have been inherited from the creatures beneath us “by descent and modification.” It has taken our Creator millions of years to produce the human frame, with its marvellously delicate mechanism, all meant to bring us into clear, efficient, and practically perfect correspondence with our material environment. Thus it is that we feel at home in the physical order. We can see clearly, we can hear plainly, we can find our way about the world with confidence, we can direct and control the physical forces by which we are surrounded with ever-growing certainty. The physical conquest of Nature has not yet been fully won, but it is proceeding apace, and with constant acceleration. Man is the lord of creation, and his lordship will ultimately extend over all the works of God.

But if man in a physical sense is the last and finest result of a long process of evolution, he is in a spiritual sense an entirely new departure. If we must speak of him as closing one line of development, we must speak of him also as beginning another and a higher one. In virtue of the fact that he is a living “soul,” he has entered on a fresh career of evolution. As rational, self-conscious, and free, he is a citizen of a heavenly order, a pioneer of a loftier destiny. “And God said :

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‘ Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness ’
. . . and it was so.’ Here at last is a creature who
has in him a spark of the divine life ; here at last is
not so much a mere “ creature ” as a child of God.
“ The true Shekinah is man.”

Now it is one of the laws of organic evolution that
when a fresh beginning is made, when a new organ has
to be developed, when another step has to be taken in
the upward scale of existence, the result does not come
all at once, but by a gradual process. I have some-
where seen a wonderful description of the pedigree of
the human eye, in which it was followed backwards and
downwards till the reader was introduced to the first pig-
ment spot in a primitive creature possessing an incipient
organ which was sensitive to the action of light ; and
then it was traced forward again, ever growing more
perfect as an organ of vision, till the mechanical beauty
and delicacy of the human eye was reached. In the
same way, if the geologic records were perfect (which
of course they are not), we should be able to follow the
course of every special organ—the wing of a bird, the
talon of a vulture, the limb of an antelope—from its
first faint suggestion in some lower form till it is seen
in its completed form in the wonderful creatures of
to-day. And everywhere it is the same. At first it
is clumsy, inefficient, germinal ; not for many genera-
tions does it define its shape and fulfil its function.
That has been God’s way of creation, always and
everywhere—not by sudden fits, but by insensible
stages, with here and there a more or less sudden leap,
but on the whole by a slow and very gradual process.

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There is now every reason to believe that it was not otherwise with the making of man. The soul, like the eye, did not arrive at once but by degrees. Man woke up to the recognition of spiritual reality by the same slow process as he woke up to the realities of material things. His feeling of an all-surrounding spiritual Reality and Being,

“ Whose presence is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,”

whose spirit speaks in the still small voice within, whose strivings after a higher life are felt in the deep recesses of the inner life, and whose cherishing uplifting influence is realised in all the upward strivings of the soul—all this did not come at once, but by slow invisible stages. And even now, in the best men and women, is it not clear that the spiritual nature is not complete, not fully grown, not perfect, but still infantile, still feeble and faint, still only half assured? Are we not spiritually not so much full-grown men as children stirring in their sleep, and beginning to awake to the glory of sunrise? We are surrounded by realities too vast, too glorious, too far above our comprehension to be clearly seen; the spiritual order towers and looms above us splendidly great, unspeakably majestic; and we, with our feeble sense, do not realise yet the wonderful world of truth and beauty and holiness into which we are born, but are rather like

“ An infant crying in the night
And with no language but a cry.”

If this is so, do you not see what follows? Is it not plain that we cannot yet expect certainty, and clear

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vision, and a confident outlook on the mystery that surrounds our little circle of light? Is it wonderful that we cannot agree about it, or speak of it in the same terms, or mark out its constellations as they gleam and glance through the cloud-wrack of our mortality? And shall we be angry with our Maker because He has not followed a method of creation other than that which He has laid down for Himself, doubtless for reasons of infinite wisdom and goodness? If it took Him so many millenniums to make the human body what it is, shall we quarrel with Him because He did not send forth the soul full-made? If it took Him countless ages to make an eye, whose use is but for a few short years at best, is it any wonder if He takes many more to perfect the soul that shall live for ever? Let us be patient with Him who made us, and who is leading us upward and onward to Himself. Knowing well that He will be patient with us, let us follow the appointed way, with earnest toil, even if it be at times with a noble sorrow of endeavour, "for He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust."

II

Our dimness of religious vision, our uncertain foothold in spiritual matters, if what I have ventured to submit is true, must therefore be a necessary part of our human lot as germinal, inchoate, progressive creatures. It is not to be wondered at that as we do not walk spiritually along a plain path, we often stumble; that our vision of God is beset with clouds and darkness; the wonder would be, being such

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creatures as we are, if it were otherwise. And when we remember that we are not only imperfect but sinful creatures, that our nature is warped, and that it is fogged with the mists of evil, it makes the trouble greater and sorer. For sin has this as its worst feature, that it separates us from God, alienates our hearts from Him, and blunts the edge and eagerness of our search for spiritual light and help. We do not know how far the race would have developed Godward if none of us had fallen into sinful ways and habits; but we do know that sin has had, and still has, a calamitous effect on our spiritual condition and career. It is a degenerative, destructive force which has the same effect on the soul as disease has on the body, and which in the end, if its effects are not neutralised, will infallibly destroy its life. It is sin, far more than imperfection, that hides the face of God from us, and causes us to wander in darkness and misery, away from the light of life.

III

And now, to bring this discussion of a great mystery to a practical issue—what are the duties that are incumbent on us in view of our spiritual uncertainties?

1. First, we must accept the condition of our lot and make the best of it.

There is a strong tendency nowadays to make the perplexities of faith an excuse for turning away from religion altogether. Men say, "What are we to believe about these so-called mysteries of religion? One man says one thing, another says another thing, and there is no common denominator, no standard of belief to

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which we can appeal. The authority of the Pope is gone, the authority of the Church is on the wane, the authority of the Bible is going. What is so very uncertain cannot be of any importance. We had better turn away from the whole thing; for clearly there is nothing to be got out of such a tangle. Let us pursue our business and have done with religion altogether." And that is what thousands are doing.

But this is to deny our birthright. It is to forfeit our career as a race of spiritual beings. It is to choose the lower lot, because it is easier and is pleasing to the natural or sinful man, and to deny the higher, because it is difficult. That is the policy not of men but of cowards.

The soul has arrived, after all the long ages of effort and struggle. The whole creation has been groaning and in travail, waiting the coming of the Son of God. And shall we who are God's sons now refuse the Great Quest? Shall we make the necessary spiritual limitations of our lot an excuse for denying our divine pedigree, and refuse to follow our heavenly destiny? God has made it hard for us to find Him, and we have made it harder because of our sin; but there is a call in this very hardship to the highest that is in us to accept it, and to make the best of it for our soul's health and salvation. And if clouds and darkness are round about God, if the way of life is perilous and difficult, if the gate of the kingdom is strait and narrow, the reward of religion is great, unspeakably great. There are shining heights to scale, and there is a land of milk and honey to conquer, "beyond the desert and the pain."

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2. But, you will say, "I am weak of soul and helpless to find my way up those heights of God; this thing is too high for me, I cannot attain to it. Sin is very near, ever crouching at the door; its fangs are in my vitals, its blindness is in my eyes, and, when I would do good and rise into this sunlight of God, then is evil present with me and I fall back again into the night. Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

And here it is that the message of our holy religion comes to our aid. We have not been left without witness; God has not forgotten the undeveloped, wayward, sin-smitten children of His love. From age to age He has sent great prophetic souls into the world, whom He has taken up the heights of vision, and to these He has shown the shining land that is so far off from most of us, and he has sent them down into the dark valleys to tell the world what things they have seen, what voices they have heard, what heavenly presences have been around them. They have spoken their message from age to age, and have borne their witness to its truth by holy lives and martyr deaths. The blind brute world has not heeded them, or has heeded them only to slay them, because it will not leave its sin, and is only enraged by these reminders of its heavenly origin and destiny. But these messengers of the Most High, these dreamers of dreams and seers of visions, have not for that ceased to tell their story; they have continued to testify that which they have seen, and declare what they have known, counting not their lives dear to them. And so the light has grown from age to age, the clouds have lifted, and God's nature and

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will have been slowly unveiled. Last of all He sent His Son, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, to complete the message and unfold the hidden secret of the Holy One. No man hath seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son—He hath declared Him. The mystery hidden from the foundation of the world has been revealed. The unknown God is no longer unknown; He is our Father, and we are His children. A ray has pierced the dark from the very fountain of light; and in this light of Jesus we see light.

3. The sum of the matter then is this—let us live in the love of Jesus. He has not removed all our spiritual disabilities. The veil of mortality is still over our vision. Our ears are still heavy to the voices of the spirit. Our religious sense is still dull and uncertain. But Jesus can do all that is needful for us, if we let Him. He can renew and purify our affections for things holy and good. He can free us from the tyranny of sin. He can fill us with a boundless trust that the message of love and hope which He brings us is God's own truth, His sacred truth. And, more than all, He can quicken the higher nature that is in us by the inspiration of His love and grace, and so make us more and more capable of sharing in the privileges of His own sonship. He will give us light as we are able to bear it, and open secret but lovely vistas into things which mortal eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, but which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

Oh, that men, who are wandering in ways of pain and deserts of darkness, would listen to the voice of the

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Well-Beloved Son! Oh, that they would lift their eyes from the dust and gaze on Him whom their sins have pierced, and seeing Him, find life in His name! For He has lived for all, and He has died for all, and in that sinless life and redeeming death there is life for all. By loving trust and holy obedience He can do for His people what they can never do for themselves and what no other can do for them—He can give them the light of life. And though in this life we shall always be more or less in the twilight, the time will come when, the veil of mortality lifted, we shall pass into the eternal day. Now we see as in a mirror darkly, but then face to face; now we know in part, but then we shall know as we are known. Meanwhile, “who hath known the mind of the Lord that he should instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.” “And we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord!”

VI

ON THE EDUCATION OF THE RELIGIOUS NATURE

“That we may grow up in all things into Him, which is the Head, even Christ.”—EPh. iv. 14, 15.

IN the previous chapter we considered the question—How comes it that our physical senses are so clear and emphatic in their testimony to the reality and character of the material world, while our spiritual sense, which tells us of God, is so dim? Why is the eye of the body so full of light and the eye of the soul so full of darkness?

Our answer was twofold. In the first place, the bodily senses are perfected for their purpose by long ages of training and evolution, while the spiritual sense is in its infancy; and secondly, our spiritual nature has been injured and still further darkened by sin and its evil consequences. That is why we are at home in the world of matter, and so far from being at home in the world of spirit. That is why times of religious unsettlement come upon us periodically, when old ways of looking at things have to be given up, and theology has to be poured into new moulds, and fresh statements of religious truth have to be made. The human soul is not in its decrepitude and decay; it is renewing its mighty youth; its best days are to come. It is not more light we need, but better vision;

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not a new revelation of God, but a clearer and closer grasp of what we have.

My purpose now is to start from this point. If what has been already said is true, the great question for us all is, how we may best develop and improve our religious life? If my soul is weak and ailing, how can I increase its strength,—how shall it regain its health? Is it possible for me to come into a clearer vision and a firmer grasp of spiritual realities than I have? If so, how may this be best done?

I

Let us for a moment emphasise the vast, the unspeakable importance of this subject.

I start with this thought—which my readers will not, I trust, quarrel with—that human life lived at its highest levels, and in its noblest quality, is a religious life. The finest type of man is not the warrior, nor the philosopher, nor the scientist, nor the artist, nor the statesman, but the saint. Our deepest homage is given not to the man who knows most of Nature, or history, or politics, or economics, but to the man who lives nearest to God, and knows most *about* Him, because he lives nearest *to* Him. I honour the man who can let me into fresh secrets of the natural world, who can harness a new force to the service of his kind; I honour still more the man who has creative power over the world of ideas, and leads me captive into the fairy lands of poesy and art; but if I know of one who can take me up the Mount of Vision and show God to me, cleansing my eyes of their blindness and unstopping

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my ears of their heaviness, then I will sell all I have and set out on my journey to-morrow to the ends of the earth, that I may find him and sit at his feet. Yes; to know God, this is life—life at its best; life in its highest quality and power; this is the life eternal for which my soul thirsts and pants, and without which it must in the end die the second death. And if I can discover the secret of finding God for myself and of enjoying Him in my own right; if by severest discipline and earnest striving and persistent believing prayer I can do *this*, then is it not worth my while? There are many quests in life worth our striving for; but this is surely the highest and holiest quest of all!

Let me then lay down a programme of spiritual self-discipline which will, if we follow it, enable us to grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God, our soul's Father and Friend.

II

In the first place we must clear our decks for action, and recognise that religion is not to be won by waiting. Like all good things, it is the reward of effort, and strong crying, and tears, and bloody sweat, if we are to have it at its best.

And in the Gospels our Lord puts this fact in the forefront of His teaching. If we listen to Him, we shall be left in no doubt at all about this. The first and last test of discipleship with Him is simplemindedness. We must be prepared to give up all and follow Him. The man who would have the highest life must be prepared to deny his lower life. He must stoop

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beneath the strait gate, and walk the narrow path. He must shoulder his yoke, and carry his burden, and make the great surrender, and there must be no looking back when once the journey is started. "If thine eye be simple, thy whole body shall be full of light," but not otherwise. "He that loveth his life, shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for My sake, shall find it," and not otherwise. Nothing can be clearer or more uncompromising than this condition that Jesus again and again lays down for His followers.

I wish we, in these days of distracting, contradictory voices, realised this as we ought. It is an age of self-indulgence, and our temptation all along the line is to make religion easy. But that cannot really be done. We shall have as much (and no more) of this good thing as we are prepared to pay for. A little effort will bring us a little religion, a little light, a little joy, a little peace: it is only to those who are prepared to go the whole way in the direction of self-surrender that the full reward can come. The hidden treasure, and the pearl of great price, can be bought with nothing less than *all that we have*.

It is a strange fact that this easy-going temper in religion stands so emphatically over against the strenuous temper we show in everything else. Contrast the eager, passionate pursuit of wealth and of pleasure, even of scholarship, which this age exhibits, with its slipshod, half-hearted pursuit of the things of God. We pour scorn on the methods of many of our mission-hall workers, which makes religion an adjunct to a pound of tea; but are our churches much better?

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I have deep misgivings about many of the religious methods we follow there also. It seems to be taken for granted that without its accessories religious work among the young has no chance. There must be cricket clubs, tennis parties, reunions, outings, pleasure trips connected with every society of believers, in order to command success. There can be no objection to these things in their own time and place ; but we must be more careful than we are to see that they are the healthy outgrowths and not the initial baits of our religious life. I cannot conceive of Paul, still less of Jesus, seeking to gather souls into the Kingdom by making the way interesting, and easy, and attractive. In the New Testament the first call and the last is to the heroic, not to the self-indulgent, element in human nature. The Christian life, there, is a race, a battle, a ceaseless and overmastering quest for which everything else has to be given up, that afterwards everything may be regained. And we must unquestionably restore that principle of single-mindedness to its central, ineradicable place. "This one thing I do . . . I press on." That is the way of growth, of light, of victory in the spiritual life—that and no other, now and always. Many things have changed since the days of Jesus ; but not this fundamental law of the soul.

III

If this is clear, that if we are to gain light, and power, and peace in our religious life, this can only come when we make religion our supreme interest, to which everything else is subordinate ; the rest follows.

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Every faculty and power of our nature grows and develops according to three laws, each of which must be fulfilled. These laws are food, exercise, and rest.

1. How am I to feed my higher nature? What heavenly manna is there for my spirit? Light for the eye, music for the ear, but what for my soul?

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness—for they shall be filled.” God has not made dainties for my palate, and left my soul to starve. He has not provided morning and evening glories for the eye, the oratorios of forest and storm and falling water for my ear, and left my inner man in darkness and silence. For the man who has a nature in tune with the Infinite, even the world of matter contains an apocalypse and a revelation. Let us quote a passage here from Illingworth’s fine book on the “Divine Immanence in Nature.” “Take a sunset” (he says) “for example—a series of ethereal vibrations, merely mechanical in origin, and as such other than they seem, whose total effect is to create in us an optical illusion, making the sun, and not the earth, appear to move. Yet as men watch its appearance, thoughts and feelings arise in their hearts that move their inmost being in unnumbered ways. Youth is fired to high ideals; age consoled with peaceful hopes; saints, as they pray, see heaven opened; sinners feel conscience strangely stirred; mourners are comforted; weary ones rested; lovers united; worldlings purified and softened as they gaze. In a short half-hour all is over: the mechanical process has come to an end: the gold has melted into grey. But countless souls meanwhile have

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been soothed, and solaced, and uplifted by that evening benediction from the far-off sky; and the course of human life to-day is modified by the setting of yesterday's sun." The scientist tells us that the gorgeous hues of sunset can all be mechanically accounted for as a series of vibrations in the ether. None the less to the spiritually susceptible God has in such a sight lifted the veil for a moment from the glories of His own being, and we can gaze on His uncreated splendour itself. I never hear Nature denounced as soulless because material without feeling that a religious outrage has been committed; for the cosmos is the temple of the Most High, and "every common bush is afire with God." See to it that you do not neglect this apocalypse of beauty that glows in the sky, and gleams in the sea, and flames in the forest aisle of the autumn, and peers at us from every "flower in the crannied wall." Feed on every fair sight, and on every harmony of sound, and on the stillness and grace of the common landscape, and open your heart to its revealing message. The man who knows how to walk down a country lane in the right mood will never lack the "vision splendid" for his soul.

But man is more than Nature, and so he reveals more of God than Nature can do. And we must feed on the revelation of God in conscience, which is within us, and in history, which is behind us, and in other souls that are around us. True, man, being free, can hide God, as well as reveal Him, and that is the sad aspect of our humanity; but the very vices and crimes and sins of man reveal God, the Holy One, by contrast,

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as darkness makes light more visible. But the help which the great and the good men and women of this poor earth can give us in our search for God is beyond words. How near He comes to us in every true word fitly spoken, in every pure thought adequately expressed, in every noble deed simply and lovingly wrought! This is the miracle of our fellowship with one another—that one man's vision by sympathy can become another's, that his strength can multiply itself through an army of weaklings, that his inspiration can set a nation incandescent with courage and hope. Thank God for those who dwell on the heights, and whose voices reach those who live in the valleys of life! Let us listen to their message, and share in their hours of exaltation; so shall our souls feed on heavenly manna and drink of the fountain of life.

Let us feed ourselves also on the great Book in which God's clearest light shines, and where His mightiest word is written. We do not make what our fathers made of the Bible. We do not read it ourselves as they did; we do not teach it to our children; we do not live by it. Man was not made for bread alone, but for every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Those who feed on the Book, those who eat this precious roll of living truth, verily do find it "in their mouth as honey for sweetness," and they go on the strength of it many a forty days' journey into the wilderness.

But there is a Word greater than the written word, and that is Christ the Living Word. He is the true manna from above. In Him is the glory of God revealed. "I

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am that Living Bread which came down from heaven : if a man eat of this Bread he shall live for ever." And that is a true saying. Christ is the Shepherd of souls, who leads His own into green pastures, and beside still waters. If you would truly grow spiritually you must feed on the celestial food which He can and will give to those who are one with Him. For while others can only point the way, He is the Way ; while others can only testify of the truth, He is the Truth ; while others can only participate of His life, He is the Life. Therefore all true spiritual growth is growth Christward ; all true life is the life which He imparts to the hungry and aspiring soul.

2. Food first, in order to grow : then *exercise*.

Without exercise, food clogs and poisons. No lazy man can be a healthy man. Work is needful for the physical life : work and struggle, and the discipline of strenuous effort. And if you would live spiritually, and grow, you must "exercise" yourself "unto godliness." Thank God, He has provided plenty of opportunities. This world is a probation, a testing, a trial, a warfare, a quest, a race. Mysteries, for the mind to puzzle over, and solve, if it can. Temptations, for the will to meet—and master. Tasks, for the hands to grapple with and complete. And all, that the soul may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, even Christ !

Men, as we have seen, are lamenting nowadays that it is so hard to see their way through the mysteries of religion. We live in an age of spiritual perplexities. Clouds and darkness are around us ; we have problems to solve which our forefathers never guessed at. But this

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surely is a sign of progress. Doubts are the true soul's growing-pains. It is because God is calling to us, "Come up higher," that we are so troubled and tossed in mind. The swaddling bands are being unswathed from the limbs of our spirit; and all children stumble when they begin to walk. None the less it is by stumbling and hard blows and many a fall that they learn to walk at all, and at last the thing is done. So let us not be terrified if at times we are tossed to and fro by this and that conflicting wind of doctrine; let us bear in mind that truth is reached only by shocks and controversies and many a battle between this and that school of thought, and in fighting this battle the soul is learning to develop those "wrestling thews" that shall at last enable it to "throw the world."

And is it hard to fight with temptation? Is it hard to meet life's losses, and terrors, and estrangements? It is, very hard; and it is meant to be hard. But then hardships are the training ground, the riding school of souls that would grow. Do not let us remain children, but become men, who look on temptation and trial not as our doom, but our opportunity. Even Christ did not escape this strenuous discipline, for He knew what disappointment was, and sorrow beyond sorrow, and fierce combats with the tempter, and the bitterness of death. Thus, and not otherwise, did He too conquer; so was He made perfect—a full-grown Man, who made temptation "crouch beneath His feet," and stood at last "pedestalled in triumph." Can we drink of the cup that He drank of, and be baptised with His baptism? We are able in His strength so to do, and the promise is, that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.

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And are there tasks to do in the spiritual life that are hard, and service to render which is difficult? Unquestionably. But here too there is a great reward. There is no better educator for the mind, no nobler discipline for the soul, than that service for others which is the privilege of the people of Christ. If we would grow unto Him, we must share in His work, we must take part in His service. "Son, go work to-day in My vineyard." God says that to us not only for the sake of His vineyard, but for our own sake. Who are the elect souls of the earth? They are those that are busiest in doing good. Who are those in whom the saintly quality predominates? They are those who spend themselves wholeheartedly in His service. Who are those that have the clearest, most constant, most rewarding light on the path of life? They are those that find their meat and their drink in doing the will of their Father who is in Heaven. As we live and work for Christ, life's shadows lift; windows break open on all sides; we walk in the light of life. God whispers His dearest secrets in the ears of those who do most for Him.

And then there is prayer, strenuous believing prayer—what an educator this is! He who prays, says the old Latin proverb, also works. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Surely here, if anywhere, is the master secret of soul growth! It is the outreach of the soul Godward; it is the finite spirit standing on tiptoe seeking to absorb and be one with the Infinite Spirit Himself. If you would develop your spiritual nature to its limits—nay, if you would

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lift those limits away, as Samson lifted the gates of Gaza—pray with earnestness, and with faith.

3. It would be well to say a word about *rest* as another and final condition of growth in goodness. For rest, as well as food and exercise, is needful for attaining the soul's stature. But, it may be said, there is no room for rest in this world of perpetual change and struggle. Is there not? Surely it is possible in the busiest life to have moments of true passivity, during which the energies sleep, that they may wake to nobler and fresher activity. And there is such a thing as having an inner secret principle of restfulness in the very heart of life's tumult and stress. Paul had such a secret, and John, and above all, Jesus. "Joy is like restless day, but peace like quiet night." Cultivate that peace. There is a perfectly quiet, silent spot, we are told, in the centre of the wildest storm, and there can be such in the life of all. Christ is the Giver of rest, the Fountain of that peace which the world cannot give, nor take away.

VII

THE VALUE OF THE TRANSIENT

“And this word ‘yet once more’ signifieth the moving of those things that are shaken as of things that have been made, that those things that are not shaken may remain.”—HEB. xii. 27, 28.

THERE are times in the world’s religious history, as there are in the spiritual experience of individual men, when this passage sounds like a ringing bugle-call of encouragement and inspiration. We are unquestionably passing through such a period just now. All the old landmarks of thought are disappearing under the rising tide of a great world-change. In no department of thought can the old attitude of dogmatic certitude be any longer honestly and confidently maintained. It may truly be said that there is not a belief held sacred by one man that is not questioned by some other man who appears equally sincere. The validity of Christian faith, the being of God, His relation to the universe, the historical foundations of our creed, the Book which gives us the material for shaping our creed—all are being questioned, or denied, or re-stated in other and unfamiliar terms. To an inquirer whose mind is in uncertainty it may well appear that nothing is sure, nothing is permanent, nothing is reliable; and that the very foundations of human thought are being transformed into chaos. “What are we to believe, and whom are we to believe,” they say, “when scientists

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like Haeckel and Lodge disagree fundamentally as to the spirit basis of matter and life; when higher critics and old-fashioned theologians quarrel as to the inspiration and historicity of the Bible; when Maeterlinck says that science has banished the last traces of Providential design and oversight from the cosmos, while others are reconstructing the old theory out of those very facts of science?" Truly there is a shaking of things divine and human, of beliefs, convictions, opinions, and ideals, to their uttermost bases and limits; and men's thoughts are becoming confused and their hearts troubled.

I

Now the teaching of this text is startling, and yet comforting in the extreme—and it is this: that such times of upheaval are good for men to go through. It is not a pleasant process to have all our ideas passed through the crucible, to have our very convictions upset and questioned—nay, to have to go through the process of questioning them ourselves. But it is good for men individually to ask themselves, not only if they are sure of what they believe, but how much of what they have believed is true and how much false; it is good for individuals, it is good for nations, it is good for generations, to have to pass through these times of uncertainty. The process of unsettlement, in other words, is as divine as the process of settlement. God sometimes sends earthquakes into the moral and spiritual world as well as the physical, and overthrows the very creeds in which men shape their thoughts concerning Himself. Heaven as well as earth seems to be sometimes shaken to its

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foundations, and that by its own Maker ; not wantonly, and to give His children pain, but for their benefit and growth. It was so in the time of the writer of this epistle, when Judaism was broken into fragments in order to pave the way for Christianity. It was so in the time of Luther, when the foundations of Roman Catholicism were shaken to make way for Protestantism. It is so to-day, when the Protestant faith itself seems to be passing through a period of tumult and questioning on the way to the New Evangelicalism based not on the infallible Church, nor the infallible Book, but the Personal Christ.

And the text tells us why this is so. It is because truth, as we apprehend it, is never fixed, but grows from little to more, from the cruder to the more perfect form. And it is because what we call truth is for us never pure truth, but something that is a mixture of truth and error, the transient and the permanent ; and it is essential that we should be frequently reminded of this by having to revise our beliefs, and rebuild the temple of our Faith.

II

The chief emphasis of this passage is of course laid on the value of the permanent elements in faith as compared with the transient. When God shakes the spiritual world it is that the things which are eternal may be recognised and grasped, and that the passing things may be recognised and thrown aside. Just now, however, I desire to dwell mainly on *the value of the transient elements in religion*. It is only as we recognise

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the place of change that we can measure the value of permanence. What we have to give up is the price of what we obtain, and it is only as we realise the price we pay that we can appreciate the thing we buy. A settled faith is never so firmly and gladly held as when it has been saved out of a wreckage of discarded beliefs.

Let us begin with an illustration. All growing things are composed of two parts—the part which grows and remains amid its changes, and the elements that carry it on from stage to stage but which are periodically cast aside when their work is done. The tree grows and remains, but the leaves perish, and the bark is often shed from year to year; and constantly as these pass away the wood grows in strong concentric rings. If last year's leaves remained on the tree it would cease to grow, for the buds which form at the roots of the leaves cannot expand except as they push off the dead leaves of last season. Wonderful is the work done by these beautiful leaves! They are the lungs of the trees. They draw the nitrogen from the air and store it up in their cells for the use of the sap which circulates throughout the whole living plant and deposits its nourishment everywhere; and when they have done their work they wither and die, and in their dying fill the landscape with glory. And what leaves are to trees, shells are to nuts, the rind is to apples and pears, and all outward coverings are to every fruit after its kind. Within is the living seed which is the principle of life, and for the sake of that seed all the pulp and integument which clothe it exist, and these having

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fulfilled their purpose, decay and perish as soon as the life of the seed is secured. Nature expends all her arts and ingenuities in furnishing every seed with its appropriate covering and food. The purple bloom of the plum, the acorn's cup, the stone of the peach, the flesh of the orange and lemon, the prickly rind of the chestnut—these are all so much material for securing life in its tenure, and passing it on from stage to stage.

So it is with the spiritual seed of faith. The eternal element in religion must also have its shell, its integument, its sustaining but transient envelope. The soul of man apparently cannot assimilate or digest pure truth. It must have an earthly form, it must take its complexion from the minds that hold it, it must incarnate itself in certain institutions with which it becomes identified; and so we have the eternal relation between flesh and spirit which is meant to be a help to both, but which so often becomes a drag and a hindrance. That trouble begins when men mistake the form for the substance, and cling to the form when the vitalising spirit has departed and embodied itself in other shapes. But this should not make us despise the temporary forms of faith, or try to make out that they are a hindrance and not a help.

III

For instance, many Protestants are in danger of taking an entirely hostile attitude to the Roman Catholic Church, as though it were and always had been the incarnation of anti-Christ. I heartily believe

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that that Church is now a serious, and sometimes fatal, hindrance to the spread of true religion. But we must not be carried away by that belief into regarding Roman Catholicism as always and everywhere the same. There was a time in the history of the world when that Church saved Christianity from extinction. The Papacy succeeded to the Empire of the Cæsars, and planted the centre of spiritual authority in the heart of the corrupt ancient world when it seemed to be falling into utter moral ruin. It conserved the old Roman and Greek civilisation at a crisis when it seemed doomed to utter destruction. Was not that Church in the early period of her purity the protector of women and children, the judge between kings, and the sanctuary of the oppressed? Read the history of the ages of chivalry, and you will find that when Europe was a viper's nest of poisonous intrigue, and barbaric cruelties, and unbridled ambition, the only sane, sweet, humanising influence in the world was the influence of the Christian Church, which at that time meant the Roman Catholic Church. Later on it grew corrupt, the time of its glory passed away, and it became the channel of superstition and the instrument of oppression over body and soul. Thus, when the old husk of Catholicism was split at the Reformation, and the live seed of Protestantism burst forth into life, the world began a new career of progress and enlightenment. None the less, for centuries Romanism was a noble institution.

Take an instance nearer home to ourselves. It is still the fashion among some of our younger theologians and a few preachers to pour a withering satire on the

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old doctrine of the literal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. There is hardly any intelligent Christian believer who holds such a view to-day, and not a single Biblical scholar of repute. Is that a reason for showing scorn and contempt for a doctrine which was sacred to our forefathers, to whom the only possible theory of the Bible was that the Holy Ghost dictated it to its writers word for word and comma by comma! I fail to share in an attitude so ignorant and so "superior." Looking back to the long ages of darkness, I see that the honour and adoration in which the very letter of Scripture was held was one of the temporary, but precious, ways in which the Great Book was preserved for us from loss and from corruption. Before the ages of printing every copy of the Scriptures had to be written by hand. It was easy to make mistakes, and easier still to copy them; and, in the perpetual multiplication of copies, so many errors and contradictions would, in time, through careless transcription, have accumulated that the text of Scripture would have become hopelessly corrupt, as is the case with some of the masterpieces of Greek and Roman literature. Even as it is, it takes a scholarly man, nay, many scholarly men, to deal adequately with the slight differences between the various texts and versions of the New Testament. Yet there is no ancient book that has come down to us with a text so pure as has the Bible. With the exception of a few verses, we have perfect assurance that the words of this Book as we have it are the words of the Book as written by their writers under the influence of the Holy Spirit; and we have that

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assurance because those ancient copyists believed it to be a deadly sin to change or alter a single letter in the original text, and so took the uttermost pains to keep that text pure and accurate.

More than this. We owe to the old doctrine of literal inspiration another unspeakable benefit. It gave the Bible a sanctity and an authority in periods of spiritual lawlessness which nothing else could have given it. It made men read it and study it, and learn its priceless truths, with a passionate devotion and desire to penetrate into its inmost meanings. It enshrined the holy of holies of the Christian truth. It opened out the secret treasures of revelation. It kept the Bible in a place by itself in the literature of the world,—and it was the place which belonged to it, and belongs to it still—as the unique library of God, in which He makes known His secret will, and claims the soul of man for His own. The Bible is the treasury of Christ, and without it we should not know the Eternal Son who dwells in the bosom of the Father and reveals the Father to His children. Through the progress of enlightenment, the old theory of dictation by the Holy Ghost is now discarded as a temporary belief which did duty in its day, and preserved the kernel of Christianity within its shell till the hour when God had other means of safeguarding it. We have not yet come to the full light of that historical criticism which will ultimately take the place of the doctrine of inerrancy, but already the Bible is becoming a living Book to many who thought it was dead, and its everlasting truths are taking their place among the shaping influences of the new world of

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knowledge and life. To the man who reads, marks, learns, and inwardly digests the Scriptures it is still (nay, more than ever) the Word of God; and it is not too much to say that the power and influence of the Bible in the future will put even its past power and influence in the shade. The earthquake of Biblical criticism which has unsettled so many minds for a time, and which has seemed to not a few like the dissolution of religion itself, is even now proving the truth of my text, inasmuch as "it signifieth the moving of the things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things that are not shaken may remain." For the end of it all is that the Living Christ has been put on the throne hitherto usurped by the Book that reveals Him, and "of His kingdom there shall be no end."

This, then, is God's method of leading men to Himself. It is the way of a revolution and change. There is no fixity in men's grasp of spiritual truth: their vision alters as the view changes and God's plans are matured. It is a way of growth.

"Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns."

It is a way which passes from the literal to the dynamic, from the material to the spiritual, from the outward to the innermost place where the Spirit of God touches with His finger the naked spirit of man and fills him with Himself.

IV

What follows from this train of thought?

I. To begin with, this—that God has many ways of fulfilling Himself.

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There are the times of revelation when His message comes, hot and incandescent, from the lips of inspired men who speak as they are "moved by the Holy Ghost." Then there are the times when out of the quarry of the revealed message men hew their creeds and build their churches, and their thoughts tend to become fixed and mechanical. Then there are the times when these creeds and institutions are called in question by earthquake shocks of revolution and scepticism, and everything seems coming to an end. Finally, there are the times of reconstruction, when out of the ruins of theologies and creeds a truer creed and a more living theology takes its rise, and once more the movement of progress in religious thought begins a higher course.

2. Again, we learn that in these periodic convulsions, such as we are passing through to-day, nothing really divine and living can perish, but only the things that are of no permanent account.

Judaism perished, but Christianity arose out of its ashes. It was the schoolmaster that brought men to Christ. The tyranny of Roman Catholicism was broken at the Reformation, but it was only to discover the Bible as the final source of appeal in Christian thought and practice. The old theory of inspiration has broken down under the stress of the new knowledge, but it is only to reveal the Christ of God within the Book in His glorious beauty and unfading grace as the living Saviour and Lord of His people. So it goes on, and ever we come to a purer and nearer approach to God. What is lost is the human, what remains is the divine element in religion.

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3. Therefore, let us not be dismayed nor alarmed at the breaking up of our childlike faith, "our early views"; for God disturbs us that He may fix our faith on firmer foundations; and make doubt, if honestly and reverently faced, His pathway to the truth.

The only thing to be afraid of is that we should grow to doubt that truth exists, or cease to care for it because we love the darkness rather than the light. It is not honest scepticism that is perilous, but frivolity and shallowness of mind—the attitude of the cynic and the pessimist who declare that truth itself is a fiction, or that it is not worth having. Blessed are they who, though for a while in the dark, press on ever towards the light; cursed only they who love the darkness because their deeds are evil. For these, till they repent and turn their faces towards the glimmering dawn, must go down into ever-deepening night. But those, who through darkness reach upward in faith that the night of their doubt will end if they are faithful to themselves, shall not fail to see the morning. For God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; and He will not disappoint those who, loving the light, love Him as the fountain of light.

VIII

THE FOUNDATION AND SAFEGUARD OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

“With freedom did Christ set us free. Stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage.”—GAL. v. 1.

I

ONE of the first-fruits of the preaching of the Gospel was a new sense of spiritual expansion and liberty. As soon as its wonderful message began to find a response in the hearts of men, we hear a sound as of breaking chains, and of opening doors, and of songs of deliverance. For the first time in the history of mankind the soul was released from these swaddling bands which had been worn so long that they bid fair to be its grave-clothes, and it walked forth free, and erect, and confident in the new liberty wherewith Christ had made it free. In the “great rose of dawn” that streamed from the Cross, men “could not see for the glory of that light,” and even the Lord’s apostles did not realise what a complete deliverance had come to them. It was to St. Paul that the meaning and the scope and the grandeur of this deliverance was first revealed, and from the beginning of his ministry he made himself the champion and exponent of the principle underlying it. He dared to believe and to preach that at last all the stubborn barriers of nationality and race, of custom and caste, of social distinctions and political privilege, were finally

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annulled in Christ Jesus. "He that is called in the Lord is the Lord's freed-man" is the text on which with infinite resourcefulness and amazing fire and passion, and from a hundred different points of view, he kept preaching, and which he never ceased to expound with undying enthusiasm and conviction till he laid down his wearied but undaunted head on the executioner's block.

It was characteristic of St. Paul that he recognised from the outset the strength of the opposition which this spiritual emancipation would awaken; and that he set himself to meet it step by step and day by day. Fortunately he was a fighter as well as a philosopher; and he gave himself with the joy of a hardened veteran to the combat. He had first to encounter the timidity—almost the treachery—of his colleagues, "withstanding," as he here tells us, Peter "face to face," and vindicating the rights of the soul against being saddled with even the rags and tags of former bondages. But later on he was met by less principled and more persistent enmity. An organised band of reactionaries set themselves to poison his converts against his teaching, and to wreck his work. This roused St. Paul to put forth the reserves of his mighty genius and the resources of his passionate personality to undo the mischief. In this Epistle we see him at a white heat of indignation and remonstrance. Sometimes by detailed argument and Rabbinical subtleties which we find hard to translate into clear and logical thought, but often by noble outpourings of inspired insight, varied by lucid expositions and detailed enforcements of practical Christian duty,

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he here expounds the central principles of the faith to his converts and contemporaries. He could deliver frontal attacks of irresistible fire and momentum; but this and others of his letters show that he had the gift of executing flank movements and developing sudden surprises, all of which together in the end silenced his enemies and won his cause. It was given to St. Paul before the day of his martyrdom to see the central principle of the Gospel—the emancipation of the soul through Jesus Christ from all its shackles and bondages—vindicated and built immovably into the foundations of the Christian Church, and his writings have been the armoury of all, in every subsequent age, who have been called to renew the combat and drive back the resurgent tides of reaction and tyranny.

II

What, then, is the basis of this gospel of spiritual freedom which was first vindicated by the great apostle of the Gentiles? On what grounds dare we affirm the right of every soul to its religious liberty?

It is not enough to say that the love of liberty is ingrained in the human heart. All men have the desire to be free; and the terrible wars of history are so many milestones registering the slow and uncertain advance of this principle. We hate tyranny; we love our own freedom. That, however, does not settle the fundamental question. Men naturally love many things to which they have no inherent right; and they must base even their valid rights on valid grounds if they would worthily win and retain them.

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Now it seems to have been almost universally taken for granted by the advocates of the principle of human liberty that the right to it is self-evident, that it is, as it were, a fundamental axiom of social ethics. Even so classic a work as J. Stuart Mill "On Liberty" contains no proof of this right. Throughout that noble work, the principle is assumed as though it needed no proof. And yet, from the utilitarian point of view which the writer occupied, it would be difficult indeed logically to prove this right. It is by no means self-evident that men who misuse their liberty have any right to it from the point of view of social utility; indeed, it is universally agreed that men who abuse their liberty beyond certain bounds shall be deprived of it. Nor can we find this sanction in any later system of social ethics, least of all in the agnostic evolutionism to which the logical conclusion is Nietzsche's theory of the "Overman," that the strong man, the dominant man, the man with the biggest brain and the largest resources has the right to rule all others, if he can; which is the old rule of "might as right" come back upon us with a swing with which primitive man began his chequered upward career.

And we shall fail of any sanction for the right of individual freedom except on an adequate valuation of the individual as such: *i.e.*, on religious grounds. Not in what a man is in his earthly relations, but in what he is in his heavenly affinities, do we realise his right to freedom. According to the Gospel, every man is a soul, made in the divine image, and endowed with moral freedom, opening out on either side into great

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spiritual possibilities. His life must therefore be freely realised, or it cannot be realised at all. In secular relations he is bound to abide by the necessary restrictions which the community imposes on individuals. But in his religious relations he is a citizen of an ampler realm, a freed man of a higher order; and as such, no earthly authorities or tyrannies, when they invade this realm, have any jurisdiction over him; he is free from law. This revelation of the inherent dignity and the divine possibilities of the soul was first fully made in, and through, the incarnation of the Son of God; the possibility was made objectively actual through the atonement of the Cross, and subjectively real through the new life in Christ Jesus. A Christian man is still in his lower relations amenable to the laws of his fellows, of the State, of Society, of his class and order; but every Christian man, and every other man as potentially a Christian, is in regard to the realm of faith and conscience, and the relationships belonging to that realm, amenable to no earthly law, but only to the revealed will of the Most High. "To Cæsar the things of Cæsar, to God the things of God." How to draw the line between these two realms, which in practice intermingle in a most intricate and perplexing way, is theoretically, perhaps, impossible; it can be done only in detail as life's problems are presented to us in the concrete; but the distinction is a final and fundamental one, and when the moment of decision finally arrives, every man knows the alternatives. Luther, standing alone and at bay at the Diet of Worms against the banded might of secular culture, ecclesiastical authority,

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the religious and social conventions of his age, and saying, "Ich kann nicht anders, Gott helfe mich!" is a picture of the redeemed and emancipated soul making the eternal choice between temporal and eternal loyalties, and choosing his side between the bondage of the letter and the freedom of the spirit.

III

It is impossible to ignore the fact—and we here would be the last to try to do so—that Britain has been chosen in the providence of God as the typical battleground for the rival principles of despotism and liberty in modern times. The history of England for the last four centuries has been the history of a great struggle, culminating in a great emancipation. As we study this history three facts come into view with unmistakable prominence. First, the real centre of the struggle has been, not in the social or political spheres, but in the spiritual. With this nation, beyond all others, the question has been the religious question, and the religious question has been the question of the spiritual liberation of the soul from the shackles of ecclesiastical bondage. Beneath and within every political movement that has swept over our country during this period, there has been this deeper and higher movement; and it has determined every other in the long run. If you want the key to British history since the Reformation, you will find it in the story of the Free Churches. This has recently been re-written for us in a way both scholarly and popular, and in a style at once lucid, persuasive, and restrained, by Mr. Silvester Horne. We

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see there, as he puts it, the "story of an unconquerable spirit dedicated to an indestructible ideal." This ideal is the same as that expounded by St. Paul with such force and passion throughout his epistles, that in and through Christ the soul of man finds its release and emancipation from all tyrannies, and that because Christ has done this for him in the spiritual realm, man has a right to freedom in every other.

What noble testimony was borne to this principle by our forefathers you will find told in this book. It would be hard indeed to imagine a more moving and inspiring account of the great emancipation. The facts, without embellishment or invective, tell by their own weight. And these facts demonstrate beyond controversy that the Puritan spirit, which is the Protestant spirit, which is the Pauline spirit, saved this country not only from falling back and being entangled finally in the old legal, ecclesiastical and spiritual bondage of Rome, but from the utter wreck of its civil liberties. By unconquerable faithfulness to their convictions, successive generations of Free Churchmen slowly vindicated and built into the very constitution of this country the principle of civil liberty and religious freedom. And our civil liberties have been won on the only ground which could give them any valid meaning and ensure their abiding safeguard—and that is the religious ground. Because Christ, by His Incarnation and Passion, has freed man from "the law of sin and of death," He has purchased freedom from all tyrannies whatsoever.

2. This book brings home to us another neglected

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aspect of this great controversy. By a curious inversion of emphasis, the story of religious liberty in England has been almost identified in the popular mind with the story of the Pilgrim Fathers, who went forth like Abraham of old seeking a better country, and founded the commonwealth of America on the shores of that far continent. Let no one doubt or belittle their devotion, their courage, their heroism, for it was unquestionably great. But this book tells us the story of a nobler band than that of the Pilgrim Fathers. *They* left their country to its fate, and started across the Atlantic to found a freer and ampler realm of their own. But there were others who *remained* to carry on the great warfare here, where they had to encounter the organised might, the unscrupulous hatred, the pitiless persecution of the enemies of religious freedom. These are the men and women who made modern England, and I will venture to say that the making of modern England demanded a far more heroic spirit than the making of America, inasmuch as it is easier to found a new State in which freedom shall be the watchword than to wrest and vindicate the principle of freedom in an old State out of the grip of all the monopolies and tyrannies and organised interests that have been built through centuries into the very fabric of government. If you wish to refresh your minds as to the facts of this great struggle which has made England free, you will find them put in Mr. Horne's book in a form that should move you to the depths and fill you with a humble pride that we are permitted to follow in a succession so apostolic and so Christlike.

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3. But there is a third fact that thrusts itself into view in the study of this great struggle. It is that the victory in this warfare is never fully won, for the enemy can never be utterly destroyed. He can only be held in check. "The price of liberty," therefore, "is eternal vigilance." We must "stand fast" in the liberty wherewith Christ through His Gospel has made us free, otherwise we shall be entangled again in a yoke of bondage.

This is so vitally important a fact that I wish I had time to develop it at length, but a very few words must suffice. Let me point out, then, two illustrations of it in European history—one negative, the other positive—which form a vivid and instructive contrast. What constitutes the difference between the success of the American Revolution and the failure of the French? In both there was a great passion for freedom, in both the watchwords were "liberty, equality, fraternity." Yet the French Revolution, which had set out to vindicate the natural right of every man to freedom, had no sooner got the upper hand than it became itself the bloodiest tyranny of the ages, and the "Contrat Social" of Rousseau found its anti-climax in the despotism of Napoleon. Why? Because, as Mazzini has shown so forcibly, behind the demand for liberty in France there was no religious faith, and failing that, it lost its power to vindicate itself. France forfeited her right and her opportunity to do this when she harried the Huguenots, and wiped out of existence the only party that had the real power to establish her freedom on a worthy and

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enduring basis. And why, on the other hand, did the American Revolution succeed? Because, while incidentally it was precipitated by a mere dispute about a tea-tax, behind and within and at the heart of the American Revolution there was the old Puritan faith in the spiritual right of a people as well as the individual to its freedom. The men who attempted to create a free France were atheists, and they failed; the men who fought for the independence and freedom of America were believers, and they succeeded in establishing, on foundations that—let us hope—cannot be shaken, a free, progressive nation destined to become perhaps the most potent the world has yet seen.

Well, now, what of ourselves? Here the situation is a peculiar one. Many of us had thought that the battle against all the forces of reaction and spiritual bondage had been finally won. For half a generation the spirit of the Free Churches had been almost lulled to sleep by the sense of an assured security and an almost completed task. Liberty of thought, of conscience, of speech, of worship had been purchased with the blood of our martyrs. These privileges were here when we were born, and they have been with us all our lives as part of the air we breathe and the sunlight that gladdens our eyes. Just one thing more, and the pile would be complete; let only the Church of England be freed from the bondage of the State. But we have grown too easy to trouble, too tolerant to reawaken the embers of a spent controversy, and the younger generation of Free Churchmen were almost ready to abandon what seemed like an uncharitable attack on a venerable and harmless

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anachronism. We have been rudely awakened. Athwart our slumbers a great cry has been sent out to fall into the ranks ; and we have done so only in time to see the links of the old chains being reforged, and the cause of freedom set back for half a century. Once more we have had to step hastily into the arena—some of us are even now not fully awake—and to take our almost rusty weapons in hand ; for the serried ranks of the foe are upon us. The ancient battle was for the freedom of men and women ; the battle to-day is for the freedom of our children, the men and women who are in the making. But the issue is the same. It is ever the old fight for freedom from the law, from ecclesiastical bondage, the first echoes of which we hear sounding so strenuously in the Epistle to the Galatians.

And let us bear this well in mind—that it is with us, the Free Churches, that the issue rests. We shall look in vain for effective help from the masses outside the Churches. We are fighting their battle as well as our own, but they neither recognise the danger nor have they any adequate motive-power to meet it. There is no motive adequate to this great struggle except the religious motive : the love of civil liberty, as it is the child of the passion for religious freedom, cannot endure without its deeper and higher sanctions. And let us not vainly delude ourselves with abstract considerations, such as that truth is stronger than error, that the hand on the dial of progress cannot be turned back, and such empty generalities. Truth is nothing except as it is grasped by minds that realise it clearly and passionately

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love it; progress is nothing except as it has an army of Ironsides to defend it against the stress of reactionary forces. As Stuart Mill says, "The dictum that truth always triumphs over persecution is one of those pleasant falsehoods which men repeat one after another till they pass into commonplaces, but which all experience refutes. History teems with instances of truth put down by persecution. If not suppressed for ever, it may be thrown back for centuries. To speak only of religious opinions: the Reformation broke out at least twenty times before Luther and was put down. Arnold of Brescia was put down. Fra Dolcino was put down. Savonarola was put down. The Lollards were put down. The Hussites were put down. The Albigeois were put down. The Vaudois were put down. Even after the era of Luther, wherever persecution was persisted in, it was successful. In Spain, Italy, Flanders, the Austrian Empire, Protestantism was rooted out, and most likely would have been so in England had Queen Mary lived or Queen Elizabeth died. Persecution has always succeeded, save where the heretics were too strong a party to be effectually persecuted. No reasonable person can doubt that Christianity must have been extirpated in the Roman Empire. It spread, and became predominant, because the persecutions were only occasional, lasting but a short time, and separated by long intervals of almost undisturbed propagandism. It is a piece of idle sentimentality that truth, merely as truth, has any inherent power denied to error of prevailing against the dungeon and the stake. Men are not more zealous for truth than

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they often are for error, and a sufficient application of legal and even of social penalties will generally succeed in stopping the propagation of either. The real advantage which truth has consists in this, that when the opinion is true it may be extinguished once, twice, many times, but in the course of ages there will generally be found persons to reassever it, until some one of its reappearances falls on a time when from favourable circumstances it escapes persecution until it has made such head as to withstand all subsequent attempts to suppress it."*

To us has been entrusted the great task of seeing that the principle of religious liberty is finally vindicated. If ever we should be proud of our Congregationalism, which has always stood in the van of the army of progress, it is to-day. There was a time when we had to bear the brunt of the whole battle, and we won it for England. Now we are surrounded by a great multitude of sister Churches imbued with the same passionate love of freedom as ourselves. And so we can go into this last, best fight with cheery hearts, sorry indeed that it has to be fought, but gay with hope and confidence that this time we will not pause, nor fail, nor turn back till the finial is put on the spire of our English liberties, and there is equality in the eyes of the law for all the Churches of the Redeemer, when there shall be no State Church, and when in every State school the children of the State shall be as free from the tyranny of the priest as the wave on the sea or the wind on the mountain.

* "On Liberty," pp. 16, 17, People's Ed.

IX

WHAT IS SIN ?

“ For all have sinned.”—Rom iii. 23.

I HAVE a very sad subject to deal with in this discourse, but it is an all-important one. What is sin ? How are we to think of this trouble that is upon us as a race ; this blight and mildew in human nature ; this fountain of bitterness, this well of sorrow in our experience ; this cloud that darkens the face of God, and turns earth's sunshine into the shadow of death ? It is a great problem, a terrible enigma, to the mind ; it is a sore bafflement and hindrance to the will ; it is the destroyer of peace in the heart. We have all known it in experience, for we have “ all sinned and come short of the glory of God ” ; yet we are all more or less puzzled by it. And in view of the reopening of the fundamental questions of religion that is going on just now, we must face this question among others. What is sin ?

I

I begin by pointing out an undoubted fact, that so far as earthly creatures are concerned, sin is a fact of human life, and of human life alone. No animals sin : all men sin.

This statement is a very wide one to make, but I think it is unquestionable. It is proved by a very simple fact—that

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man is the only earthly creature who ever suffers remorse, who feels sorry for what he has done. It is true that horses and dogs and other domestic creatures show a strange appearance of such sorrow sometimes ; but, as Sir Oliver Lodge has pointed out, you will only find it among domesticated creatures, and then only in a faint and imitative manner, as though a little bit of human nature had found its way into them from outside, and was struggling for foothold. The point is that no trace of such a feeling of sorrow for what it has done is ever shown by an animal in a state of nature—*i.e.*, away from human training and influence. The lion is never sorry for having eaten a traveller, or a wolf for having devoured a lamb, or a cat for having tormented a mouse. For they are simply what they are, and do what they are impelled to do, and obey the laws of their nature because they cannot disobey them.

But with us it is different. We are constantly being haunted by something we have done or have not done, because we have done it or have not done it. And this is not a feature of one man or another, but of all men. There are vast differences between men, ranging from the heights of sainthood to the depths of depravity, but there is this feature common to all—a sense that there is a gap between what they are and what they ought to be. There are men who are given “over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” ; and there are men so good that they make others feel as though they belonged to a better world ; but if you could look into their hearts and listen to their inner confession, the best as well as the worst are conscious of this gap, this

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dislocation, this contrast between "ought" and "is." There is none that doeth good, no, not one; we have all "gone out of the way," *i.e.*, the way of perfect, ideal goodness.

II

There are two ways of explaining this strange but universal fact in human life; and there is a third way which more or less combines these two.

1. The first way is that which till recently was universal among Christian thinkers, that man is a being who was created not only innocent, but in a sense perfect, and that he has dropped into a lower condition which is untrue to his real nature, and which shows itself by this feeling of remorse or sorrow for what he is. Man, in other words, is a fallen creature. This fall took place in the very beginning of man's appearance on the earth in the way described in the third chapter of Genesis; and its effects have continued through the law of heredity or "original" sin, so that every son of Adam and daughter of Eve are "depraved" or "sinful" by nature, *i.e.*, they have a proneness towards wrong-doing, so that all men fall into actual sin as soon as they are capable of moral action, of choice between the good and the bad, the better and the worse.

2. The second way of accounting for the fact of sin is quite a recent one, but it is held by probably the majority of thinking people nowadays. That theory tells us that man is not a fallen being, who began his career in a better or perfect state of being, but one who has climbed up from a lower stage by a process of

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evolution. Now, so far, he is not different from other creatures, who have all climbed up from some lower form of life to their present position. But he is different from all other creatures in this: that in virtue of a God-given gift, man is not the mere creature of heredity and circumstances, but has a certain power to assist or retard his own further development in every sense. He is a creature not made but in the making; and he has been taken into partnership by his Creator, so that he can help God (or hinder Him) in the work of perfecting his own nature. In other words, there is a lower nature in him derived from his animal origins, strong and vital, and full of passionate desires. There is a higher nature in him, which is weak and frail and undeveloped, but of infinite worth. There is thus a conflict ever going on within him between the lower nature and the higher, and because he is within limits free to choose between this and that he is able to help on or to hinder his higher, true self from gaining the victory over his lower. And as a matter of fact, there is not only a perpetual struggle between the ideal and the actual within him, but the actual so far wins the day that he is always haunted by the sense of failure and wrong-doing. He feels that he ought, always, to give his higher spiritual nature the victory; but that victory at best is only partial, and, though he is perhaps, on the whole, winning, the struggle is accompanied by the sense of unaccomplished possibilities, of frequent lapses, of recurrent defeats. And so comes the sense of sin, the feeling of remorse.

3. Now whenever I find two or more theories formu-

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lated to account for the same facts, I try to find out what they have in common. And in this case it seems to me clear that there is truth in both. Man is certainly a creature in process of development. He is advancing in a hundred directions; and the impulse to advance is so powerful that though it acts fitfully and is often checked and thrown back, it never really ceases to act; so that when humanity goes back in one direction it tends to recover itself, and to realise in one way what it fails to realise in another. The race on the whole is advancing, is growing better; its face is towards the future; it is filled with a sense of higher things, and it reaches out after them with an irrepressible desire. The world of to-day is, on the whole, a better world than the world of Moses, of Confucius, of Paul, of Augustine. The higher life of the world may be checked, it may be far from what it ought to be; but the forces that make for goodness are stronger than those that make for evil. Hopefulness is thus our only reasonable attitude towards the future of the race.

None the less certain is it that there is something more the matter with human nature as it is, than a feeling of not having progressed fast enough. The human conscience testifies to a feeling of some moral disaster or calamity that has fallen upon it. It is haunted by a stronger feeling than that of failure to attain. Some poison has mingled with the very blood of the soul, so to speak. We come into the world weighted not only with our animal nature, but with a paralysis or sickness in our higher nature itself. We cannot call our animal desires wrong; they are healthy and good in themselves; they conduce to the

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continuance and vigour of our being; we cannot dispense with them. The mischief does not seem to be there, but higher up, in the will itself. When we would do good—*i.e.*, when our desire is right and true and healthy, then is evil present with us, and not only when we would do wrong. This is the problem of human nature—that the very instinct in us for advance, for betterment, for growth in goodness, is not acting as it should; it is somehow injured; it cannot assert itself. This is true of the race as a whole, which moves forward in such a blundering, uncertain, half-hearted way. And it is true of the individual. We each can testify, as everybody that is honest with himself must do, that we are wrong, not in our animal nature, which when managed properly and kept in order is perfectly normal and right, but in that part of us which is not animal but human,—the *will*, which is at once the pivot of choice and the channel of power for our higher self.

Now no mere evolutionary theory can account for this fact of our nature; and it is this which the old theory of the Fall attempts to account for, and which, when broadly conceived, does account for it. At some distant period of our history as a race—perhaps at the very beginning—a wrong turn was taken, and its consequences, passed on through the mysterious law of heredity, continue to this day. Man is a rising creature, with a principle of betterment deeply implanted within his nature which has never been quite uprooted; but he is also a fallen creature, whose nature has been thrown out of gear through the effects of habitual sin, which has largely paralysed the power to rise. And so

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man is a distracted, struggling, tormented creature, dragged in different ways, unable on the one side to sink contentedly into evil, and to forget God and goodness in that evil, and yet on the other unable to shake off the incubus and burden of this sinful nature, which clings to him in spite of all his endeavours to free himself from it, and makes him cry out, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

III

So much for the general question—how to account for the fact of sin. But in this discourse I am not aiming so much at theory as practice, and I now want to turn our thoughts very closely on ourselves.

Let me, then, go on to say that this sense of sin, which in previous generations was so acute and full of torment, seems to have recently lost a good deal of its edge and insistence. Men are not troubled as they used to be with a sense of the awful reality and devastating nature of the evil in their hearts. And there are teachers who defend this attitude. Sir Oliver Lodge, for instance, has said, in one of his many recent excursions into the realm of theology, that the man in the street does not trouble himself much about his sins nowadays; and he seems to justify this change of front. Another leading thinker has even more boldly said in effect that sin is only a mistaken and misleading search—as it were, in the wrong direction—for the larger life, *i.e.*, for God; or in other words, that it is only an attempt to realise one's possibilities on the wrong plane of effort and experience. This has shocked many

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people because of the blunt and vivid way it was put, and well it may. None the less it expresses the unspoken idea of a great many thinkers. The old Puritan attitude of fear and shame and sorrow at the thought of evil, the conviction that it is an offence against God, at which He is infinitely pained in His heart, and which rouses His loving but awful indignation—this has given way to the notion that sin, after all, is only an incident of development, that it is one of the necessary conditions of ethical progress, and that, this being so, God cannot be angry with us if we go wrong on our way towards getting into the right road. This attitude is combined with a theory that since God is omnipotent, He will see to it that in the end every sinner is somehow or other brought back to Himself. Men who sin may be going out of their way to find Him, but find Him they will in the end and at last. Otherwise God can never be all and in all.

IV

Now I want to make it clear that any theory or teaching which in any way blurs the meaning of sin as an awful and devastating mischief, for which there can be no excuse, seems to me to cut at the very root and nerve-centre of the spiritual life. Sin is the one (and perhaps the only) thing in the universe which it is impossible to justify; it is by definition the thing that ought not to be. Once we begin to whittle away its meaning, and make it a stage in progress, a fall upward, a necessary or inevitable episode in the experience of an evolving creature, we empty it of its distinctive meaning,

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and strike at the very heart of every genuine moral effort. I can see that physical evil—*i.e.*, suffering, and calamity, and limitation, and loss—has many helpful functions to fulfil; but moral evil—sin—is the one thing that has no function to fulfil; it is a purely destructive, disintegrating force, an essential blight, a backward, downward stumble of the soul; it ought not to be, or ever to have come into being, at any time in the life of any creature of God's making. It may be quite true that, sin having once entered into the world, God and man in co-operation may force it into the service of goodness, and make it a stepping-stone to better things; but this cannot alter the essential nature of evil. If it had never come to pass, we can easily see that the race on the whole would long since have evolved into a very different stage of spiritual development from what we now find to be the case, even in individuals at their best. The fact that the only perfect being, the only typical man whom the world has ever seen, was made *perfect through suffering, yet without sin*, shows how essentially different the problems of suffering and sin are, inextricably as they are interwoven in human experience. Suffering is one of the needful conditions of our physical life, preserving us from danger, stimulating us into a larger life in virtue of our efforts to overcome it, and sweetening our proud and self-indulgent nature by its discipline. But sin is the mortal enemy of our highest, our spiritual life; and as such alone are we justified in dealing with it. That is the Christian view from the beginning; and it is the only view that can safeguard the soul in its perilous journey through this world.

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Consider, you who are the parents of little children, what it is that "gives you pause," that makes you catch your breath in a sudden panic of alarm, when you see the first beginnings of this tainted nature showing itself in your dear ones. The first conscious lie, the first cunning little sign of meanness, the first deliberate act of disobedience to righteous authority—how is it that it fills you with a wild apprehension for your child? Do you make light of these beginnings of evil? Do you smile indulgently at them, and say to yourself or to each other, "It is all in the day's work; it is only the first stumble upwards; it will all come right in the end"? No; in proportion as you love your child, you will feel every parental instinct roused into fierce antagonism against this evil thing that is beginning to mar the innocence of your child, and to fasten itself like a poisonous asp on the little soul entrusted to your keeping. You are ready to throw your arms round your child in a wild desire to save it as from something fiendish, destructive, ruinous; you are ready to do anything, to suffer anything, to dare anything, in order that you may save it from this arch-enemy of the race. And you do this because you have yourself suffered from this deep trouble; you have your scars to show; there are marks of burning on you; you have your memories of unspeakable conflicts with it; you know that you yourself have been saved from it "as by fire." And so you would undergo anything if you could but secure your child's emancipation and escape from this awful, damnable disease whose seeds are in every laughing baby's heart, and whose fruit are the apples of Sodom and the fires of Gehenna.

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Now that is the attitude and feeling which the Bible tells us God takes up towards this evil poison of sin in the race. It fills Him with indignation; it makes Him overflow with pity; it rouses Him to all the redemptive ministries of His grace, that we may by faith in Him be saved from its clutch of fire. The Old Testament is a myth, the New Testament is a dream, unless they mean that God sorrows over the world's sin as a mother over the sins of her little one; that He does suffer, and is willing to suffer, in order to defeat it. The Cross of Christ means nothing if it does not mean that God in Christ bowed Himself under the yoke of death in order that sin itself might be slain. Whatever else the Cross means, it means that. The blackness and horror of sin are thrown up in all their awful intensity there. It is seen to be what it is—something so bad, so awful, that it involved the death of God's only begotten Son in order to overcome it.

I warn you, then, against anything and everything that softens your antipathy, that blunts your hatred of sin. Let no easy theory, no bland complaisance, rob you of your moral horror of wrong-doing. Listen to no man who says that sin is a mere negation of goodness, a mere absence of holiness. It is that, but it is infinitely more. What has destroyed millions, body and soul; what has poisoned the springs of life in countless multitudes of unhappy men and women; what has plunged nations into final ruin; what has swept whole races off the face of the planet as by a consuming fire of destruction; what has hindered the upward march of humanity for untold centuries and

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millenniums, and still hangs like a millstone round its neck, cannot be a negative thing. It is a horribly positive and destructive thing. Our only remedy for this trouble is to be found on bended knee and in earnest cries for deliverance.

And that deliverance can come only from one direction. It is the way of the Cross. Calvary was God's midnight agony endured for us ; it is also God's morning glory, for then the first blow was struck which means eternal victory at last. Because Christ died for us, we must live for Him, and in living for Him we shall be delivered from the power of sin, and from the fear of the second death, which is the doom of unrepented sin. For "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; but the soul that repenteth, it shall live. "There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."

X

THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

“ Tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”—HEB. iii. 15.

AMONG the fundamental questions of the Christian faith that are being brought up for discussion, and that will have to be faced, there is not one more vitally important than this—*Was Jesus sinless?* If so, how do we know that it was so?

I

I say that there is no more fundamental question than this. It is only when we find ourselves challenged as to our grounds for believing it that we realise with a shock how much it means to us. For nearly two thousand years this sad, sinful, struggling, hoping world has clung to this happy and beautiful faith that there is one exception to the universal rule, and that while there is not one of us men and women who has not gone astray, and fallen into both positive and negative wrong, we can look up and find Jesus standing there in the Gospel story pure, immaculate, sinless, holy, without spot or blemish or any such thing. Once in the course of history, as Robertson of Brighton said, God produced a Man without sin, whose “purity was as that of snow on untrodden Alpine heights.” Other heroes have their feet of clay; He is all gold through and through. Other saints have had their moments or days of lapse,

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He never lost for one moment His firm and immovable grasp of the Ideal. Other leaders on the pathway of life have themselves wandered now and then a little out of the way; He ever walked in the centre and showed no trace of wavering. Other noble spirits have had to confess that however high their final attainments and their last dearly won victory, there is somewhere in the recesses of their hearts the memory of one or more ineradicable stains; but He never showed the trace of such a feeling. Why do we love to look into the eyes of a little child? Because we see there something we have lost for ever—innocence; something we never find when we men and women look into each other's eyes. And why do we feel drawn, fascinated, subdued, when we face the Christ of the Gospels? Because we think we see in Him alone that lost Eden of the soul—its innocence—preserved in all its beauty and purity without flaw to the end. Because we see One who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and therefore made higher than the heavens in our reverence and worship. This has been the delight and happiness of our faith from the beginning, and if it were lost we should feel—should we not?—that earth had lost her one spot of pure glory, and Heaven itself its perfect whiteness.

Yet we are asked to reconsider this question, and that not by sceptical writers only, but by some of the leading preachers who belong to the "left wing" of modern theologic thought. There are at least two recent volumes which contain clear and outspoken discourses on this subject, and the result at which the writers arrive is practically a negative one. That is to say, they

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decline to come to a positive conclusion on this all-important question. They say that we know too little about the life of Jesus, especially about His early life, to be able to form an opinion as to whether He had always been sinless. Even granted that we cannot find any trace in the records of the Gospels that He ever did wrong, that He ever chose the lower course instead of the higher, this, they say, is no guarantee as to the unrecorded period of His life.

It would be well to face our treatment of this grave and all-important subject by realising that there are really only two alternative attitudes possible. We shall in the end believe either that Jesus was sinless or that He was not. A "don't know" attitude really means a negative attitude. For you can really say of millions of people that you do not know that they ever committed a sin; you do not know enough about them to say so. Nevertheless you act and feel towards them as though they were like others, *i.e.*, as though they were sinners. And so the man who says of Jesus, "I don't know whether He was a sinner," will end in giving up His sinlessness; and with His sinlessness goes all that is distinctive, authoritative and divine in the Person of our Lord as the centre and power of the Christian religion.

II

It would be well to begin by saying that we cannot hope for a moment to establish our belief in the sinlessness of Jesus by recounting separate virtues and excellencies, or by ignoring the gaps in our knowledge of His earthly life.

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1. The fact, for instance, that the picture we have of Him in the Gospels is so full of bright, beautiful, attractive colours does not prove our case. Separate excellencies do not prove sinlessness. We might recount a thousand virtues in our Master, and yet there would be plenty of chinks and crannies hidden away in which some flaw might have lurked. When the list was complete we should still have to say "we do not know." And we must further confess that we can never enter so thoroughly into the inner life of another person as to say of any particular virtue or excellency that it came of a perfect motive or temper. When you say of this or that particularly noble act, "it is beautiful, it is divinely pure and loving," you are only describing one side of it—the outside; the other side, the inner side, is known only to the person who does it, and that may be very different.

Further, however good a man may be to-day, that does not carry with it any assurance that he has always been good. The fierce light that plays about a man's public life does not tell us much about his private life. The fact that to-day he stands out as a really noble and truly saintly character does not mean that he may not have come to that condition out of a very different condition long ago. Men change for the better sometimes, and some of the saintliest figures in history (Augustine, for instance) were once lustful, vicious and profligate. It is a glorious fact, that men may "rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves" to the very edge and margin of a sinless life.

Our belief in the sinlessness of Jesus must therefore

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be tenable in view of the fact that we know comparatively little of even His public life, and that we know still less, we might almost say practically nothing, of the thirty years of childhood, adolescence and youth that preceded it.

2. Nor can we build our belief in this supreme fact alone on the impression made by Jesus on His friends and followers, *i.e.*, on those who knew Him best during His earthly life. Even they could not go beyond external acts, and describe them from the outside; not one of them ever penetrated into the secret place where motives are born, and actions, good and evil, take their rise. I am not belittling the testimony of the evangelists and the apostles in saying this. The fact that Jesus surpassed all of them without exception as a sinless person is of immense significance and importance for us in judging of this matter. For it is clear that He did give them that deep, ineradicable impression, and that in this He stood alone, absolutely alone, in their experience. You do not find Peter saying of John, "There is a sinless soul," nor Paul of Peter, nor Luke of the Virgin Mary; but all of them evidently felt it of Jesus. And yet we must confess that this does not necessarily carry conviction. For they may all have been mistaken. The charm and glamour of a great, noble, commanding personality whom they loved and honoured beyond words may have carried them off their feet and dazzled them into a mood of loving exaggeration in thinking of Him and in writing about Him.

All these external arguments therefore, important as they are, will not suffice to carry home the conviction

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that once in the course of human history a great Person appeared whose soul was white with the whiteness of the morning, and who was free from that universal taint of wrong-doing and wrong-being which is the tragedy and Nemesis of every soul that ever was born.

Yet it is clear to all "Evangelical" believers in the Saviour, that this wonderful, unique, solitary Person, whom we call Jesus, was sinless, and that in Him was no shadow or taint of iniquity and sin. How, then, do we know it; and why do we so persistently cling to it as a supreme act of faith and trust in Him whom we call the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the World?

III

Let us penetrate more into the heart of our subject, and see how it looks from within. Let us consider it from the point of view of the consciousness of Jesus concerning Himself. We shall find the key to the mystery there if anywhere.

Now it is one of the most wonderful things about our Gospel narratives, that while they profess to give us only the story of Jesus's life, His words, and His actions, and His outward career, they do let us into the secret of His inner life. Somehow, we can scarcely tell how, they take us by the hand, and enable us to step across that magic line of separation, that threshold of reserve, which guards the unseen life of one man from the intrusion of another. We speak sometimes of the Gospels as though they merely gave us a *picture* of Jesus, or rather four different and yet harmonious pictures of Him. But while they do that, they do a great deal

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more than that. It would, indeed, be truer of them to say that they *present us with the soul of Jesus* than with anything that we can call a picture of Him. Somehow, in a very simple and artless way, but in a very convincing way, they lift the veil, and we look in His very heart, we feel His presence, we know Him for what He is. We feel that no verbal description of a man can convey to us a sense of his personal quality—what makes him different from other people, what makes him *himself*; nothing but his presence will do that. Then all sorts of questions about him at once fall into the background, and a real sense of acquaintance at once begins;—we say of him “I like that man,” or “I do not like him”; “He is a straight man or a shifty man, a kind man or a hard man.” Now this is the miracle of the Gospels—that they do seem to give us a sense of the personal quality of Jesus as though we felt His eye on us, and He was revealing Himself to us from within. And the impression is deeply carried home that here is someone different from anyone else we have ever known. It is very wonderful, but it is intensely true, as every real, open-minded student of the Gospel will at once confess.

IV

And if we further ask what is this personal quality, this spiritual *aura* or breath that comes to us from the Jesus of the Gospels, we shall not be long left in suspense.

We shall feel, we *do* feel, as we read and ponder and study this wonderful Person, that there is one thing about Him in which He is absolutely and qualitatively different

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from anyone else we have ever seen or heard of. Something is absent in the impression we get of Him which is present in the impression we get from all others, and something is present in it which is always absent elsewhere. There is a gap in the self-consciousness of Jesus, and yet there is a positive quality that seems to fill and overflow that gap.

The gap is this—here is one who has no consciousness of demerit, of wrong-doing, of sin. Here is a heart that feels no stain ; here is a memory that holds no remorse ; here is a soul that seems absolutely innocent and pure, and that knows itself to be such. The best of men do not feel like this ; the better they are, the less do they feel it. If you get into the confidence of the saints of the earth you will find of them that the words of the hymn are true :

“ And they who fain would love Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.”

But Jesus evidently does not feel like that. It is not that He tells us He is free from sin, but that He bears Himself so. He never confesses sin ; He never asks for forgiveness of sin. We have several of His prayers, but no prayer that in any way suggests repentance ; many petitions for help He puts up, but never one for pardon. Where, with us, there is a sense of unrest and disquiet and remorse, there is in Jesus a sense of perfect freedom and ease and inner peace—the peace of a soul that knows nothing of sin, and therefore nothing of repentance.

And what is it that fills the place of this gap in the spiritual consciousness of Jesus ? Is it pride and self-sufficiency ? Not in the least. Rather it is a calm and

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convincing sense of being in perfect accord with the Eternal purity and holiness. He claims for Himself not only that His meat and His drink is to do the will of His Father who is in heaven, but that He always does the things that are pleasing to Him. He does not say that He does this without effort. He is sometimes sorely troubled and tried ; His soul is at times greatly straitened ; He has to overcome hard and heavy temptations. But the struggle always ends one way ; and that is the way of clear and absolute victory. His life seems from the inner side of His self-consciousness to be the reality of which this text is a reflexion, " Tempted in points like as we are, *yet without sin.*"

But that is not all.

If any, even the best man or woman of your acquaintance or mine, were to take up this attitude towards the all-holy will of God, and speak and act as though he were utterly unconscious of any gap between mere desire and accomplishment, between ideal and fact—what should we think of him ? *We know inevitably what we should think of him. He would stand at once as self-condemned.* He would be convicted instantly of either moral incompetence or moral hypocrisy. We could not believe of anyone whom we know that he was sinless in this absolute sense. Good men we know, who knew their own imperfection ; sinless men we do not know ; least of all should we speak so of men who acted and spoke as though they were sinless. But, *we do not feel so concerning Jesus.* He gives us the impression that there is nothing more odious to Him than hypocrisy ; there is nothing indeed that He denounces more

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passionately and more frequently, yet when He speaks and acts and bears Himself as though conscious of unbroken obedience to the will of God, there is that about Him which bears the stamp of absolute sincerity and truth. He who challenges the world to convict Him of sin, is the very one whom the moral conscience of the world, by common consent, justifies for doing so.

And withal what a beautiful lowliness marks the bearing of Jesus towards the holiness and majesty of the Divine Will! Here is righteousness without flaw, and yet no trace of self-righteousness. Here is a mind unstained with a sense of sin,—with humility for its crowning quality! We must, however, bear in mind that all this sense of sinlessness was accompanied by a feeling of unrealised possibilities in His life. Even He had not, at any stage of His earthly life, attained to the ultimate and absolute goodness; for there were before Him at each moment heights of experience yet unscaled, victories of holiness not yet won, jeopardies and temptations still unmet and unconquered. Not till He had completed the work which had been given Him to do, not till He had gone through the last awful experience of the Cross, and had thus shown Himself “obedient unto death,” was the last possibility of sin conquered even in His holy life. And so, through all His career, we note the same sweet and beautiful humility which is both the hall-mark and the final safeguard of all spiritual worth; and when lightly accosted as “Good Master,” He gently set aside the title and said, “Why callest thou Me good? There is no one good save one, and that is God.”

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V

I close with two remarks, that need to be carefully remembered.

1. Notice how this argument for the belief in the sinlessness of Jesus makes us independent of the plea that we do not know enough of the facts of His life to be able to take up this position.

For in the consciousness of Jesus which is revealed to us in the Gospels, and which is reflected in the Epistles, we have the guarantee we seek. His consciousness, like that of all persons, was a unity. What we do not know about Him, He knew about Himself. He knew all about those thirty years of silence, and what He was and how He bore Himself during those turbulent, unsettled years of adolescence which have left so many sad memories in most of us; He knew, too, all about His own motives, and inner struggles and experiences, which He never told to anyone. And thus since we know that those years left no such evil memories in Him, and since He, scrutinising His own inner life as He, we may be sure, did, found there nothing to repent of or to be sorry for, we know too that all was pure and fair there as it was outside. You will say, "But this is still an act of faith, this is still a leap in the dark!" If so, I answer, "Yes, it is a supreme act of faith, as all true religious acts are. What we know of Jesus is so entirely consistent with belief in His sinlessness that what we do not know of Him must be equally fair and beautiful and good. He is our Friend, and we trust Him; we believe in God, we believe also in His Son."

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2. And now, in closing, let me point out the infinite preciousness of the truth we have been trying to recover from the grip of doubt and uncertainty. If Jesus is in very deed sinless, then everything follows that is vital to the Christian Faith. If Jesus is sinless, I can believe that He is in the very secret of God, and that His revelation of the Divine Fatherhood is a true and final revelation. If Jesus is sinless, I can believe that He is the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. If Jesus is sinless, the fact that He everywhere and always showed a loving, trustful, hopeful attitude towards sinning people, makes me able to believe that God loves them, and trusts them, and is willing not only to forgive them, but to redeem them by His grace. If Jesus is sinless, I can believe that I can not only be forgiven for my sin, as He says I can, but that He will give me strength to go and sin no more. All the great blossoming gospel of God's love is in this truth of the sinlessness of Jesus, as the splendours of summer are guaranteed by, and unfolded from, the first pure snowdrop of the spring. A belief in this beautiful truth is the pearly gate that opens the Kingdom of Heaven and its blessedness to all believers.

Therefore let us cling to this truth with both hands, and all our hearts—that we have in Him a great High Priest, who is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”; and who is therefore “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He liveth to make intercession for them.”

XI

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN

“ But when He heard it, He said, They that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick.”—MATT. ix. 12.

JESUS CHRIST is the Good Physician as well as the Good Shepherd. His public ministry proves that He recognised two deadly enemies of mankind. The arch-enemy is sin—the dread evil that afflicts man’s soul, against which He directed the whole forces of the spiritual world. But there was another enemy against whom He also waged a hearty and persistent warfare—disease, which afflicts man’s body. He thus proved His love for man’s nature as a whole, and laid down the redemption of the race on that double basis, without recognising which the world can never be fully saved. For man’s life is a unity with two essential sides; he is a compound of matter and spirit, clay and divinity, immortal soul and perishable body. Salvation means restored *health*; and the old proverb, “*Mens sana in corpore sano*,” is thus the condition of that perfect well-being which it is the will of God that we should all normally enjoy. In our actual experience we seldom attain to this happy condition; but that we were meant for it, and that we should strive hard for it, is shown beautifully and convincingly in the attitude which Jesus took towards sin and disease throughout His public ministry. He treated them as enemies, and He

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recognised their close connection; He did what He could in forgiving men's sins to heal their sicknesses; and in healing their sicknesses He never failed to emphasise the darker evil of which disease is fundamentally one of the most persistent symbols. "But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), 'Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk.'"

It is not possible for us nowadays to combine the healing function and the pastoral function as Jesus did in His work. There has been a necessary sub-division of labour between the minister and the physician; they have each too much to learn and too much to do to fulfil both duties efficiently. It is a pity that this is so; and a good departure is being made in the mission field in reuniting, to some extent, the two severed functions. But at least there should be a hearty friendship and co-operation between the physician and the pastor—much heartier than is usually the case. Both should work together with a full recognition of the close relation between bodily health and spiritual efficiency. The ideal minister and the ideal physician are close friends and fellow workers. In Jesus the two were one.

We are all familiar with the work of Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the soul. Just now let us turn our thoughts to His function as the Good Physician. As our starting-point we will take a motto given some time ago by the eminent surgeon, Sir Frederick Treves, to a class of medical students, describing the spirit and attitude of the faithful doctor towards his work,

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which we shall find beautifully applicable to our Lord in His treatment of the sick souls and bodies of the men and women whom He healed and blessed long ago. The true physician, he said, should do his work "*fortiter, fideliter, feliciter.*" That is to say, he must be *strong*, he must be *faithful*, he must be *happy*: strong to combat with disease, faithful in discharging his duty, happy and gracious in dealing with his patients. Let us see how these words characterise the work of the Good Physician; and let me repeat that when we speak of Jesus as the Good Physician, we do not refer to Him simply as one who long ago healed men's bodies, but as One who is for ever the Healer of their souls. His healing function when on earth is a fair parable of what He is able and willing to do for all men in healing their spiritual diseases.

I

"*Fortiter.*"—The Good Physician is *strong*. He is *able*; He *can heal* all who will go to Him for health.

Jesus while on earth proved that He was *strong to heal*. And He showed these attributes of strength in His work—knowledge, sympathy, willingness.

Without special and intimate knowledge no one can be a true physician. And this knowledge must extend in two directions. A doctor must be able to diagnose his patient—to see at a glance what ails him, how deep-seated the disease is, how far it is within the reach of the healing art. And he must be thoroughly conversant with the circle of remedies. He must know what to do and how to do it. He has a resourceful and wily enemy

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to deal with, who will take instant advantage of every mistake, of every act of ignorance, of every failure to meet his attack at any point; and the man who deals with him must be equipped at all points with a perfect knowledge of the case in hand and of the phalanx of remedies with which to meet and defeat the foe. This double armoury of power—a quick and unfailing insight into the patient's case, and an instant recognition of the right treatment—is the first condition of success in the healing art.

There is no one who has ever shown this kind of strength—this secret of power—as did Jesus. His knowledge of men was perfect. He knew not only man as a race, but every man whom He met as an individual. He manifested an instantaneous insight into the hearts of those who came to Him for treatment. As we study the Gospels there is no feature of His earthly work which comes home to us with more frequent and happy emphasis. With one look He saw what ailed men; in one word He revealed them to themselves; in a moment He told them what they must do to regain spiritual health. To one man He dispensed a word of forgiveness as well as healing; to another a word of comfort, soft and refreshing as the evening dew on parched grass; to another a word of rebuke, which was like a sword dividing asunder, as it were, the joints and the marrow, and carrying conviction into his heart; to another a word of warning, which told him where his special weakness lay and how to meet it. When men came to Him with insincere questions and half-confessions—and how often has a doctor to deal with such

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cases!—He ignored their spoken words, and spoke to their real trouble, as though they had laid it all bare before Him.

“His kind but searching glance could scan
The very wounds that shame would hide,”

and those who came with large professions and high-sounding words went forth startled and abashed at His startling insight into their heart's innermost secret.

Now this is the Good Physician with whom we have to do, and to whom in prayer we are invited to approach. *He knows us*; He can tell us what is the matter with us; He knows what to do with us. Those who have been ill, and have had the privilege of treatment by a physician who has inspired them with entire confidence, know the intense relief of being in his hands, of seeing his face, of hearing his clearly worded and convincing advice. It is for us in our spiritual trouble to go to the Good Physician, to lean on His perfect knowledge, and look to Him for sure guidance. Perhaps there is a secret sin gnawing at our heart, or we have a weakness we dare not confess to a living soul, or there is a perplexity that no human being can share. If we had met Jesus in His daily walks, we would have followed Him as so many did in that far-off day, because He drew their confidence by His very presence; we would have thrown ourselves at His feet, feeling that He was strong to know, to help, to bless, and we should have found relief and release through Him as they did. Thank God, we can still go to Him and lay our sick soul at His feet, saying, “Lord, Thou *canst* heal me if Thou wilt.” Rich people have done it in their extremity and distress;

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and they have found Him strong to heal, with almighty resources of comfort and helpfulness. The cultured and the ignorant have done it ; sinners, vile as intimacy with the coarsest evil the world contains could make them, have done so, and others whose valiant but beaten souls have fallen back baffled from the gates of Heaven at the very moment of self-conquest ; and to all He has spoken the emancipating word and given the needed help. There is no problem that can affect us, no sorrow or shame so overwhelming, no darkness of soul so thick, no weakness of will so hopeless, but that we may find a remedy for it through Him, by the study of His recorded works, by prayer for His Holy Spirit's illumination and guidance. He is the *strong* Physician of Souls.

II

The second word in the code of the Good Physician is *fideliter*. The true doctor must be absolutely *faithful* not only to his profession, but to each case with which he has to deal.

I should like here to pay a hearty tribute to the medical profession as a whole. There are good men and there are, of course, bad men in it. But on the whole, there is no calling or occupation in which there is more faithfulness to the call of duty, none which can tell of truer deeds of heroic self-devotion to one's work. How many fine young doctors died during the late war, victims of loyalty to the call of suffering and disease ? In the firing-line, in the field-hospital, on the open veldt ; unthanked, often criticised, no doubt because

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they could not do the impossible, underpaid, overworked, these men drooped and dropped and died at their post, with no one to sing their praises, or to put a cross—the symbol of self-sacrifice—on their unknown graves. And what was seen in South Africa is only a specimen of the heroic lives of many doctors at home, who go instantly, anywhere, at the call of suffering, and do their best for others, day or night, whether well or ill themselves, wearing themselves out, often for very inadequate reward, and most of them in consequence dying premature deaths. We all know what a debt we owe to these good doctors, a debt which no money could pay, and for which no gratitude is too deep or sincere.

In this, too, there is a full reflection of the fidelity and faithfulness of the Good Physician in His work for men. We see it in very clear and patent form in His devotion to the sick and suffering around Him. He was never too tired, too absorbed in other duties, much less in His own pleasure, to attend to the cry of disease or distress for succour. He was drawn to the relief of pain as by an inner instinct; it reached Him through every distraction; and it awoke an instant and unflinching response in His heart.

For if Jesus was strong in knowledge of men, He was no less strong in love and tenderheartedness. His glance was "kind" as well as "searching." When He saw how oppressed men were with the woes and weaknesses of life, He felt for them as though they were His own. "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." There are times when we are told that

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the sight of deep suffering awoke a kind of holy anger in Him. He was "troubled," He "groaned in spirit," He "wept." Who shall measure the unfathomable depths of that sympathy which wrote itself in deep lines on His countenance, and made Him old before His time, and broke His heart at last, so that when pierced on the Cross, it sent forth "water and blood"?

Now our sympathy is very often bounded by our ignorance. There are wise men who say that the more they know of men, the less they feel for them, because their sufferings are seen to be the righteous fruit of their deeds. It was exactly the reverse with Jesus. He knew men perfectly, but that only made Him feel for them the more. Were their diseases brought on by their own fault? Were they helpless and sick and worn and sad because they had *sinned*? Then they needed Him all the more; here was a double disease demanding above all things sympathy and pity, and calling for forgiveness as well as help.

And are you, dear reader, suffering to-day in some way because you have done wrong? Is your physical pain accompanied by *heart-ache*? Have you transgressed some of those double-sided laws of well-being which visit their punishment on body as well as soul? Or are you suffering as He so often suffered, physically, because of the demands made on your strength by the selfishness or the wrongdoing of others? Dear hearts—to Him with your burden! He sees it and knows it all, and has all the deeper sympathy with you because of your greater need. For it has been said of Him, "He is a *faithful* High Priest," who has been tempted

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like as we are and who knows the "feeling of our infirmities," and so is able to succour them that are being tempted. Faithful was He on earth, even unto death, that He might bring heavenly healing and health within the reach of all who need it; faithful is He to-day, to renew your strength and mine, by the inflow of His loving sympathy and divine "grace in time of need."

III

Once more the Good Physician not only does His work *fortiter*, and *fideliter*, but *feliciter*. That is, He is not only strong and faithful, but *gracious*.

How diversely do doctors enter into the sickroom, and bear themselves to their patients! And how important it is for them to cultivate a kindly, gracious manner, as well as show strength and sympathy. There is no time when we feel so grateful for gentle courtesy or for loving handling as when the body is on the rack of suffering and the mind is filled with a torment of pain. And there are physicians who gain a great name for themselves as much because of their delicacy of manner, their soothing and healing bearing, as because of their skill in dealing with disease. They carry health in their eye, and succour in their presence. There is much to try a doctor, but the last thing he must show is a churlish spirit and an irritable manner with those who ask his help.

And the finest flower of the Good Physician's life, the last touch of perfectness in His healing methods, was that He was as gracious in manner as He was kind in heart and strong in willing power. Have you noticed

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how often it is said that when He healed the sick, He "touched" them and "laid His hand upon them"? One day He was in the house of Simon Peter, whose mother-in-law lay sick of a fever, "and Jesus touched her hand, and the fever left her." Another time He met "two blind men followed Him crying out and saying, Have mercy upon us, thou son of David! And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him. Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They say unto Him, Yea Lord. Then *touched* He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened." In the death chamber of the little daughter of Jairus, He took the little girl's hand limp in death and said "My little lamb, arise." But perhaps the most signal instance of His affectionate and loving manner was in the case of the leper who came and worshipped Him saying, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Think of that loathsome figure suppurating with the most horrible disease of the world, who had been an outcast from the fellowship of his kind possibly for long years, and was obliged when a human being met him to keep his distance and call out "Unclean! Unclean!"—think first of him, drawn instinctively by the sense of his own need and the Saviour's attractive grace to His feet. And then think of Jesus the Good Physician and how He dealt with him. It was forbidden by the ceremonial law for any man to touch a leper under necessary and severe penalties. "But He stretched forth His hand, and *touched* him, saying, I will, be thou clean! And straightway his leprosy was cleansed." In

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the same instant his trouble left him, and he was received into the loving fellowship of his kind. What courtesy and grace was here! And time would fail me to recount the many instances of the same trait—how the attractiveness of Jesus to the sick was so great that they felt they must get near Him and touch Him, and how “as many as touched Him were made whole.” Can we wonder that once after one of those days of wondrous healing and kindness the people were above measure astonished, saying, “He hath done all things beautifully, graciously, well,” and were fascinated by the charm of the Good Physician into involuntary homage and worship?

And all this is written that we may believe that to us, too, the Good Physician is just as gracious, and simple, and kind, and that in these human traits of His we see a suggestion of the Divine mercy and love. What He was to men around Him, God is through Him and in Him to us all. There is kindness, and gentleness, and forbearance and sympathy in the great Heart. Let us have faith in Him and confidence that no sense of ill-desert can shake, and a loving trust in His infinite tenderness as well as His boundless power.

Finally, let these thoughts concerning Him who is the soul's Physician inspire us to a more gentle and gracious treatment of one another in all the sorrows and miseries of life. Where we can give of our strength to others who need our help and succour, let it flow as freely out of us as the healing energies of the Saviour's personality flowed out on those who sought His help. And let us do this *faithfully*; having “freely received,”

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let us also "freely give." Nor let us forget that "without the giver the gift is bare"; that without love no benefit we can bestow can fully realise itself, and carry home its blessing. It is given to the followers of the Good Physician to be the channels of His healing grace to those of their own day and generation. Whatsoever our hand findeth to do in this holy office, let us do it with all our might, and, at the same time, with all tenderness and grace of spirit.

XII

CHRIST TASTING DEATH FOR EVERY MAN

“But we see Jesus . . . that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man.”—HEB. ii. 9.

AMONG the questions that have gained new prominence during the past few months through the discussion in the newspapers on the New Theology, is the atoning death of Jesus Christ. We have been told in startling terms by one of our leading preachers, who is nothing if not candid and honest, that there was nothing in the sufferings and death of Christ that was unique and apart from human experience. “Whatever,” we are told, “can be said about the love of Christ, can be said about the love of John Smith. The atoning love is that in which Christ repeats His offering for mankind in every heart that is given up to Him. The belief that Jesus suffered some mysterious penalty and took away sins is a moral mischief.” It is not too much to say that this utterance, coming whence it did, has spread a thrill of amazement and dismay through many hearts in our Churches. For it runs counter to all that evangelical Christian believers have held from the time of the apostles to the present day. Let us submit this position to such tests of careful thought and reflection as we can apply to it.

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I

I begin by pointing out the unquestionable fact that for nearly 2,000 years the universal Christian Church has felt that whatever oneness our Lord Jesus Christ possessed with us in His human nature, in His earthly life, in His glorious example, there was something in His death that was absolutely solitary and unique, and that that death has a value for all who recognise its meaning which is not even faintly approached by the value of any other death. As the writer of this epistle says here, Jesus tasted death, *i.e.*, experienced its full flavour and bitterness, not for Himself but for others. We die for ourselves, because we cannot help it. He died for every man, because He wished every man to gain some benefit from it which he could gain in no other way. This is the belief, whether rightly or wrongly, of all Christendom in every age. It was on this foundation, we may say, that Christianity was founded. The question is—what does it mean?

There is, of course, a sense in which the death of all good and great men is of supreme interest. The passing of a noble soul has something sacramental about it. We stand in awe of the mystery of that solemn moment when all things earthly must cease for him, and all the benefit and stimulus of his personal presence must cease for us. And when at last the final breath has been drawn, and the stillness that shall never be broken has fallen on eloquent lip and flashing eye and imperial brow, we turn aside grieving that so much of worth and greatness has closed its career, and passed out of ken for ever, like a river that has suddenly run dry,

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like some fair planet sinking out of sight in the western sky.

But this is the strange, the all-memorable fact here—that the death of Jesus produces so different, so unique an effect on the mind. That it did so on the minds of the friends of Jesus at the time is plain from the fact that they have given us a picture so detailed, so awesome, so impressive in its total effect on the mind. That it has done so on the heart and imagination of Christendom since is shown by the place of the Cross in all the theology, the poetry, the sentiment, the worship of the world. In Catholic countries you can hardly walk a mile along a country road without coming on a wayside shrine with its crucifix; you cannot go into a village sanctuary nor a historic cathedral without seeing the Sacred Figure elevated high above all the symbols of the place as the greatest of them all; you cannot listen to a religious service without the same impression being made on your mind of the solitary and central fact that it is Jesus as the dying Saviour who is their great object of worship. And though we Protestants look upon this emphasis on the physical sufferings of Christ as a one-sided and therefore a misleading exaggeration of His total message, still at the heart of us we look at the Cross as the “sacred place of the Most High,” where we come nearer to the heart of God and closer to the mystery of redemption than anywhere else. The death of every other person who has ever lived is rightly looked upon as the end of his career—though his “works” may “follow” him, and “being dead,” he may “yet speak.” But the death of Jesus was the

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release of the forces of His life, the beginning of a great work for the benefit of man, the potency and the promise of the salvation of the world from sin and its penalty.

Therefore it is right that we should approach this subject for ourselves with a deep sense of *its importance for us*. What has had so great and unfailing a significance for the generations of men must, if we can get at it, have an equal significance for the men of to-day. What is it, then, that relates us so mysteriously to the death of Jesus Christ as to no other death? What were the ingredients of that agony that made it greater than any other agony? What was this wave of mysterious and divine sorrow unto death that flowed over the soul of the Holy One and the Just?

1. One remarkable thing that meets us in this death is that in some way we all feel related to it. Jesus did not die as an individual. "He tasted death for every man." We too are on that Cross; He is bearing it for us. His sorrow is the sorrow we ought to be bearing; His dying pangs are ours. Till we see something of this awful truth, the death of Jesus will be to us just what the death of anyone else is for us—an outside fact that may make its impression on our imagination, but which has no relation to our standing in the sight of God and man. But when we do see it, what a change in our attitude!

Let us put it into an illustration that I borrow from Dr. Denney's "Death of Christ." If I were sitting at the end of the pier, on a summer day, enjoying the sunshine and the air, and someone came along and jumped into the water and got drowned "to prove his love for

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me," I should find it quite unintelligible. I might be much in need of love, but an act in no rational relation to any one of my necessities could not prove it. But if I had fallen over the pier and were drowning, and someone sprang into the water—and that man an old friend whom I had mortally offended—and at the cost of making my peril, or what but for him would be my fate, his own, saved me from death, then I should say, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should give his life for his friend." And so what transforms the death of Christ into a constraining motive, and appeals to us, is this :

" For us despised, for us He bore
His weary thirst and hunger sore,
For us temptations sharp He knew,
For us the tempter overthrew,"

and "for us He died and meekly bore the scorn and scoffs of men before"—who passed by Him, wagging their heads, and mocking Him in His sore distress and anguish, as though He were the offscouring of the world.

2. And the other impression that is borne upon us by the death of Jesus is that His death had a relation to our *Sin*.

We may say that it was this discovery that began the Christian faith. When after the first sore bewilderment caused by the death of Jesus on the mind of His disciples, and after the wonder of the Resurrection had startled them out of their despair, it dawned on them that there was something sacrificial in that death, something that atoned for sin, something that broke the power over the heart and will of man, there came

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over them such a wave of gratitude and relief that it was like the rising of a new morning on their world. The dark shadow that had so long hung over their inner life was gone, as in the twinkling of an eye ; the curse was removed ; the prison-door was opened ; their souls were free from the stain, the bondage, the guilt of sin. God's face was clear ; there was no barrier between them and the enjoyment of His favour and love ; there was no more condemnation for those that were in Christ Jesus. For He had " borne their sins in His body on the tree " ; and because He so died, sin had no longer any dominion over them. I need not multiply passages to show that this was the deepest conviction of all the writers in the New Testament ; it was this that made apostles, preachers, evangelists of them ; it was this that gave birth to the Christian Church ; and it is this that has renewed it in all later ages. It is this fact which every generation of believers has rediscovered, and which has had the same emancipating and amazing influence on them all.

II

This, I say, is the spiritual experience and witness of the Christian Church in all ages. The question for us, then, is whether any light can be thrown upon the mystery ? Why does the death of Christ mean all this for us, while the death of no other man has meant anything of the kind, even in the faintest degree ?

And here let me utter a word of warning. For here we are beginning to leave the solid basis of fact, and are entering the region of theory ; we are passing from religion to theology ; we are going out of the

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range of what we experience to that of what we think. Now while men's *experience* is much the same, their *thoughts* are varied as themselves. And so while all those who have experienced the saving power and appeal of the Cross are so far *one*, yet directly they try to explain the fact, they begin to part company, and they are apt to disagree. And yet we cannot have a full religion without a theology; we must have our theories as well as our experience. In spite, then, of the danger of differing, let us see if we can put some account to ourselves of the meaning of the great fact of the Cross. For if mind and heart do not come into something like accord in view of the central fact of faith, we shall not have a happy and satisfying religion.

Let us, then, go back for a moment to the first Christians, and ask ourselves what meaning the Cross had for them. They have not left us altogether in uncertainty about this, for in the Epistles we have their own account of their reasons for believing in the atoning nature of the death of Christ.

And the first ray of light comes to us here from an unexpected quarter. Have you ever noticed that the first burden of the preaching of the apostles, as given us in the Acts, is not the Cross, but the Resurrection? It was to the Resurrection that the apostles at Pentecost and afterwards first bore witness, not the Cross. It was for preaching the Resurrection that they were first persecuted; and it was this that brought them their first converts. "And with great power gave the apostles witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." Not till afterwards

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did they come to see the meaning and power of the Cross, and that meaning dawns on them through their faith in the risen Saviour. Why was this?

It was because the Resurrection first brought home to them who Jesus Christ was; and it was His Person that gave, and now gives, its meaning to the Cross. He was declared, in the words of St. Paul, to be the "Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." The fact that He rose from the tomb brought home the conviction that here was someone more than man, who had lived their life, and died more than their death, and yet over whom death had no dominion and no power, because He was the "Prince of Life." When the conviction came upon them that Jesus was no mere man, but God manifest in the flesh—and this belief seems to have come to them not at once, but slowly and gradually—they saw that He must have died not because He must, but because He wished; not for Himself, but for them. Here was the perfect sacrifice, of which all the old rites, pagan and Jewish, were the poor empty symbols; here was the Lamb of God, who was taking away the sins of the world. Jesus, they saw, became man for man's sake, that He might condemn sin in the flesh by His sinless life; and He died, that He might adequately and fully reveal God's forgiving love to the whole race and so make atonement; and He rose again that He might justify their faith in Him as the Son of God, who took away their sins. Thus it was that "He tasted death for every man." It was a vicarious death—for others—and it was the death of God's Son for the race He loved—here is the first ray

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of light which we see falling on the darkness of the Cross. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing to men their transgressions."

What then gives its unique value to the love of Christ, and makes it so different in its appeal to the heart, is not that love is different in God or man—all love is of God—but that while man's love and self-sacrifice is God's made visible, tangible, real to us in one great atoning, reconciling act. Put aside for the moment all idea that Christ's death was the penalty of our sin, that He was punished and made guilty for and instead of us—that is a travesty of the truth, for the innocent can never, by any juggle of the imagination, be really made guilty instead of someone else who really is guilty,—setting, I say, that aside, take this as the beginning of all fruitful thought about the Cross—that on it God's Son died, for us, that He might make forgiveness possible,—and we have the first great aspect of it which makes it different from every other death, and gives it a meaning that no other death can possibly have. If Jesus was a man and no more, He was a martyr and no more; and there is nothing in His love that is not in the love of any other man. But if, in very deed, very God in Him came into our world, making Himself poor for our sakes, and dying for our sakes that He might bring us to Himself, then there is something in that far-away Cross that turns the soul's winter into summer, which has a glory above the glory of the sun, because it spells everlasting hope for every sinner out of hell. It is a "love so amazing, so divine," that it "demands our soul, our life, our all."

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Here I must leave the subject for your personal meditation. I have been able only to open the door, that a single ray of light may pour through; perhaps if you will consider it adequately, you will find it shining at last into the perfect day.

Meanwhile, let me close by a word of appeal. Do not wait till you have a full and satisfying theory of the Atonement before you surrender yourself to its power. That is the mistake many people will insist on making. They imagine that they must understand the whole mystery of redemption before they can have any share in its benefit. That is the way neither to understand it nor benefit by it. Is it not enough, in the first instance, to *feel* the appeal of love? If anyone offers you a mysterious kindness, that carries its genuineness on its very face, will you wait till you understand how and why and in what sense he offers it before you accept it? Accept it *first*, and that will be the first step to understanding it. Let it work out its wonderful benefit first, then you will have something to go upon in trying to fathom its meaning. Let this fact sink into your inmost being, that Christ, God's Son, very God of very God, came down to this little earth—lived here, suffered here, died here—all that the world might be saved from sin, and be made holy and good. Say—

" We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there."

Say, "Who loved me, and gave Himself *for me*." Dwell upon that till its wonder and its grace grow on you,

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and fill your heart with thankfulness and joy. Then you can go on further, but not till then, for you will have something to account for, whose precious meaning is felt in your deepest heart ; and until this has come to you no satisfying illumination is possible. The experience of the Cross must ever precede its theoretical apprehension ; and the experience may be unconquerably real, even though no theory can ever be found to explain it.

XIII

CHRISTIANITY A PREVENTIVE POWER—I

“ There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.”—PSALM xc. 10.

I

WE are so used nowadays to the successful suppression of epidemic diseases, even in great centres of population, that we of the younger generation do not realise what a wonderful change has come over the civilised world during the last half-century in its power to combat this subtle and terrific foe. There have been frightful visitations of small-pox, cholera, fevers of various kinds, even in this country, during the century that has just closed, but they nearly all occurred during its first decades, and now we look back upon it all as an evil dream out of which the world is gladly waking up. What is it that accounts for this wonderful change ?

It is the birth of a new science and a new art—the science and art of preventive medicine, or hygiene, or public health, as it is variously called. This has for its end and purpose not the curing of disease and the renewal of health, but the preservation of health and the prevention of disease. The world had been alive from the earliest times to the call of suffering, and the need of curing all manner of sicknesses. Great is the

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art of healing—one of the greatest and most beneficent in the world, and many are the noble and splendid minds who have devoted themselves to its practice and development. But till recently the great mistake was made of taking for granted that almost the only thing to be done was to heal such diseases as actually broke out among men; that these things were inevitable visitations of Providence, and that even to interfere with their “natural” course would be to fly in the face of the will of God. And while the nineteenth century will always be memorable for many strange inventions and wonderful discoveries, probably a thousand years hence it will be remembered most for the discovery or the invention of the new art of forestalling, and preventing, diseases that are ready to break out. The study of the subject is still in its infancy; it is only beginning its beneficent career, and what triumphs lie in front of it no man can tell as yet. Will it finally banish disease out of the world, and will men at last find the secret of perpetual health? Will death come in the end only as an “euthanasia”—a happy release in extreme old age from a life that has been sucked dry of all its resources and is no longer desired?

We cannot tell. But the reading of much recent literature on this subject has set me thinking in another direction, and to this other and higher subject I now invite the reader's attention. Have we not, I have been asking myself, been falling, in regard to the dreadful disease and epidemic of sin, into the same mistake as doctors formerly fell into as regards bodily disease? Have we not thought and felt and acted as regards

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our own souls, and as regards the world at large, as though the prevention of the evil thing was impossible, as though indeed its cure was the one and only thing to aim at? Have we not taken for granted that Christianity, the great healing art of God, is purely a remedial, a redemptive power, and forgotten that while this is unquestionably its first and outwardly its most impressive feature, far back at the heart of it there is something diviner still—its preventive power? And, if this is so, is it not time for us to wake up to the fact? Are we to take no hint from this wonderful new science which has done such marvels in its infancy, and which by the time it is full-grown may transform this planet from a hospital for sick folk into a garden in which a sanitised and recuperated race will rise to undreamt-of heights of health and happiness; and see whether we cannot similarly turn the invigorating forces of Christianity into the world to prevent and not merely cure evil and sin, and their consequent suffering? The subject is surely worth thinking about; and the more we think about it, the more vividly I am persuaded the “preventive” aspect of Christianity will come home to us.

II

I am well aware that to take this point of view will be to run counter to many prejudices and interfere with many preconceived ideas. When we have been staring for a long time at an object, and then look suddenly at something else, it is not easy to adjust the eyes to the new focus. And we have been pre-occupied

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so long with the one side of Christianity that its other aspect will need a careful adjustment of the mind to realise its wonderful meaning and scope.

To begin with, the New Testament presents the Gospel almost entirely as a healing, curative, saving process. Jesus is presented there as the Saviour, the Good Physician, the Redeemer, the soul's Healer. Man is represented as in the grip of a foul and deadly disease, as surrounded by innumerable moral and spiritual epidemics that have already implanted the germs of death in him, from which he can only be saved by tremendous efforts and a dire sacrifice on the part of the Son of God. Salvation is an escape from an evil that not only threatens, but has already actually laid hold of the whole race. The spiritual situation of the world is symbolised by one tender and loving incident in our Lord's life. "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick," said the disciples to Him one day, speaking of Lazarus; and He answered, "I will go and heal him." So we might say of mankind as a whole, "Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick," and we can hear the voice of our Friend saying in His incarnation, "I will go and heal him." And according to His own teaching concerning Himself, He came to heal, to restore, to make whole the whole sin-sick world.

All this is quite true, but it does not settle the matter. Let me express it in a different way. Suppose there were a little city in the world, the whole population of which was under the blight of a foul but secret infection which had poisoned the mind as well as the

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body, and which caused its stricken victims to do the most unaccountable things. Suppose that each in his heart thought himself well and everybody else sick. Suppose that all did their utmost to hide the symptoms of the fell disease, even when they knew that they were smitten, and went about boasting of their splendid health, though everyone could see on the face of his neighbour the sure marks of decay and death. Suppose this disease was highly contagious, and was thus easily caught and spread. Suppose, when the trouble broke out into an epidemic and carried misery and sorrow in its train, everybody blamed everybody else for it, even at the very moment when each was infecting the rest with his own particular poison. And then suppose, while pain and misery and death were rampant, there was a general plot to ignore the whole thing and proceed as though there was nothing at all the matter with anyone. Finally let us suppose that a wise and kindly physician were to arrive from some far-off country where everything was clean and wholesome and fair, and, with deep pity and love in his heart, set about putting matters right. How would he have to proceed?

He would have a difficult task, and he would have to set about it wisely. His first trouble would be to convince the people that there was something really very wrong with them. That would indeed be the hardest part of his task. There is nothing more difficult sometimes than to make people acknowledge what they know to be true, especially if they are convinced in their hearts that it is something to their discredit. But, having convinced a few of the fact

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of their trouble, the next thing required would be that the disease should be combated and fought with, and being a deadly thing, it would try all his skill and energy. Indeed, so hard let us suppose this to be, that what with the bitter opposition of most of his patients, and the terrible hold it had already taken of them, all he could hope to do for a long time would be to cure one here and one there, or at most a few better-disposed patients at a time, biding his opportunity to deal with the many unwilling sick ones. And till these first duties were performed, and the curative process was well under way, it would be clearly a waste of time and energy and thought to say much about the future prevention of a disease not yet half-cured. First heal the patients who are actually sick, then tell them how to avoid the trouble. Then there will be some chance of forestalling any further trouble in future.

Now, that is exactly the situation of the world spiritually. It has been sick from time immemorial, and its trouble has been this subtle, microbe-like poison of sin, with its thousand contradictory symptoms, its delirium, its violent outbreaks, its delusive and devastating power. And the Gospel, the good news of God, has come into the world to deal with this fell disease. Its final aim, in the words of its Herald and Founder, is to bring life, health, joy, peace, power into the world; to make men spiritually well, and to keep them well. But first there must be the actual conquest of the disease that has poisoned the race so virulently. And here, too, the trouble has been to start the cure.

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Here is a fever which has the strange power of deluding its worst victims into the notion that they are in abounding health, and which will not permit any to believe that they are in a really bad way. This delusion has to be mastered; the world must be convicted of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, before any of the higher messages of the faith can be accepted. Then the healing process must be set in action, and gradually, one by one, here a few and there a few, age by age, the multitude of the "ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven" patients of the Good Physician would be multiplied and made up into the number of the elect—which simply means those who have chosen or elected to be healed of their sin. And the condition of the world now is just this: that it is partly awake to the terrible nature of its spiritual malady and ready possibly to hear something not only about its cure, but about the prevention of the trouble for the future. And so the deeper aspect of the Gospel as God's great instrument whereby, once we are cured of sin, we may be preserved from a return of its power, while it has always been latent in the New Testament, is now ready to break out in its brightness and power, as the crown and bloom of the redemptive energies of the Cross. The time may come—indeed, all those who are looking forward to a true millennium are bound to believe it—when the world will consist of a healed and ransomed race of men and women, who will look upon the New Testament as their text-book for the preservation and perfecting of their spiritual health, rather than for the curative process by which they come back to self and God.

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1. We can thus see how the pressure of the actual state of the world has given so much prominence to the renewing, regenerative, redemptive aspect of Christianity that it has overshadowed and almost expelled every other aspect out of view, especially on a large scale, so that even where the Gospel has been preached for centuries, nay, where the Church has been at work for two thousand years, there does not seem to have been anything like the substantial advance which we have a right to expect. Take the state of London and Paris to-day and compare them with Rome and Alexandria in the first centuries. Has there been the kind of improvement in morals, in social purity, in the standards of conduct there ought to have been? An immense advance, no doubt, has taken place in certain directions, but many old evils are still here, and there are new evils, almost as bad, that are rampant. There is something wrong somewhere, or we should be further on than we are to-day. What is it? Perhaps there are a thousand things, but there is at least this: we are so careless about sweeping away the conditions that foster wrong-doing in the community, that we restrict ourselves to the rescue of individuals, forgetting that others get submerged under the flood of evil faster than they can be laid hold of. Evil in this world has the advantage of being already in possession, and we must steal that advantage for the other side if we would permanently win the battle. Otherwise the history of the Christian centuries tells us clearly that the progress of the race in the spiritual life will end in terrible relapses, or be so slow and uncertain at

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the best as in the end to take the courage out of the stoutest reformer.

2. But the new spirit is beginning to work in unsuspected places, and what we fear is lest the Church of the Redeemer may fail to manifest it herself. Social reformers are beginning to realise that they must not only rescue those who are already victims of want and drunkenness, sorrow and poverty, but that they must attack the causes of these troubles. What is the use of emptying cisterns that fill faster than we can exhaust them? It is a blessed thing to save the waifs and strays of the street, but are we any longer to neglect the causes that produce them? It is splendid to take the drunkard in hand and reform him, but cannot we begin further back, and so deal with the drink traffic that it shall not be such a terrible temptation to men to become drunkards? Help the poor unfortunate of the street to a new, clean life, by all means; but, alas! what about those who are driven to a life of sin for lack of a decent, honest livelihood? Cannot something be done to forestall this social evil that is eating away the manhood, and poisoning the womanhood, of the nation? These questions are being asked in tones that grow louder and louder, and that is at least a good and a significant sign.

3. Take another indication of the new spirit. It used to be a principle of legal punishment (as popularly understood) that its sole purpose was to visit on the culprit the righteous penalty of his crime. The fact that he was generally made a worse sinner than before by his punishment was not so much as thought of—

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that was his affair. The result was the rise of professional culprit classes, whose periodical imprisonment only resulted in hardening them in vice and making them even more reckless than ever. But a new conception of punishment has arisen—a *remedial* as related to a *preventive* conception—which aims at reforming the criminal rather than at hardening him. The principle of the First Offenders Act is still more advanced. Its aim is to punish in such a way, or so to remit punishment, as to prevent the manufacture of criminals through the pressure of legal penalties on a tender and possibly unspoiled nature. All this works in the right direction, and suggests a wiser, truer, saner and more humane method of dealing with all criminals. Certain brilliantly successful experiments have been tried locally in America in dealing with child-offenders on a basis of reformation and prevention which may well be commended to social reformers in this country, and they should be tried on a national scale in order to test their true worth. I will venture to predict that, if grasped in a firm and hopeful spirit, this treatment of incipient crime will open out a fresh era in social well-being. For a new ideal of punishment will take the place of the old, and it will be recognised that its function is not so much to be retributive as to be first remedial, and then preventive.

May we not say that in this matter sociology is acting with beneficent effect on theology? The old theological doctrine that retribution is the sole function of Divine punishment has acted disastrously for centuries on our political methods and ideas, and has delayed the process of social reform for ages. There are signs now

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of an opposite tendency. The hard Puritan notion of God is giving way to a more humane conception of His purpose in punishing sin, both here and hereafter. That purpose is not to glut a tyrant's wrath, but to furnish a channel for the remedial and preventive ministries of a Father's discipline. The doctrine of a hell whose sole function is retribution is surely a slander on a Divine grace. His hell, whatever it may be, must be a place or condition where love still reigns, and where even judgment is tempered with mercy. Whatever fire such a love may light must be a purifying fire. True, it can never be guaranteed that all souls tormented with the flames of remorse and writhing under the awful consequences of their own wrong-doing will be thereby brought to repentance, for every soul free to sin must be free also to continue in it to the end. But it is surely more worthy to believe in God's redeeming, "preventive" purpose in all the manifold action of Divine punishment, and to indulge in the hope, however dim, that somehow His severity, which is another aspect of His goodness, will lead many, if not all, to repentance, if not here then yonder in the future life. Here, indeed, we are, it must be confessed, beyond our depth, and we can only "dimly see" and "faintly trust the larger hope," sure at least that no soul in lowest hell that turned to God would ever be rejected.

This, however, is by the way. Limiting our view to this life, it is at least certain that the aim of all the fiery scourges of suffering and punishment which are inherent in the physical order is to rescue the actual sinner and to guard the innocent from falling. It is the chief

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function of pain to conserve life, to warn it of its perils and evil contingencies, and to keep it in the way of vigour and health. So much biology teaches us; so much theology may well emphasise from a higher point of view; so much the Church of Christ may worthily weave into its belief and embody in its practical programme.

XIV

CHRISTIANITY A PREVENTIVE POWER—II

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—JOHN X. 10.

IN the previous chapter we saw how during the past half-century a new science—that of preventive medicine or hygiene—has arisen, which aims not so much at the curing as the prevention of disease, and endeavoured to show how the Christian religion, while primarily concerned with the cure of sin, has also in it the power of preventing sin. We will now proceed to consider how this principle of spiritual prevention is applicable to the conditions of the spiritual life.

Broadly speaking, there are two conditions of physical well-being—a pure environment and a vigorous physical constitution; and the same is true of the soul.

I

The first condition of health is a *sound environment*.

By the physical environment we mean all those outward conditions of life, such as soil, climate, drainage, air, food, dwellings, and so on, that in any way affect the health for good or evil.

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It has been discovered that there are certain conditions in these various factors that are bad for the system, and others that are beneficial. For instance, if we live on low, marshy, impermeable soil, from which the water never runs away, we may expect to suffer from a certain class of diseases, such as ague, rheumatism, etc. If we live on dry, sandy soil, on the other hand, we shall be fairly safe from these troubles, unless already in the system. A moist, warm climate favours epidemic disease; a cold, dry air arrests it. Houses with bad foundations, ill-ventilated rooms, a deficiency in sunlight, low ceilings and imperfect drainage—in these few people can be well for long; whereas if there is plenty of light, air, ventilation, and our homes are roomy and dry, we shall be fairly immune from many kinds of disease. If the population of a city is crammed storey above storey in narrow streets and courtyards, if their habits are filthy and the drainage is bad, we know full well that there will be a high death-rate, and that if an epidemic breaks out it will be difficult to suppress it. There are some districts bracing, others lowering; here we feel that life is a perpetual elixir, and there that it is scarcely worth having. Health, that is to say, is dependent to a very large extent on soil, climate, drainage, and a general habit of cleanliness among the population.

Now the knowledge of these conditions of health and well-being would be of little service to us unless we had some control over them. Knowledge without power is a pool of despair. But, fortunately, as the knowledge of these things has extended, there has also been a

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gradual widening and sanatising of public opinion. Laws have been passed controlling the social conditions of the people; it has become a legal offence to be guilty of personal uncleanness, and to do anything which palpably endangers the health of others around us. Individual liberty has been controlled in order the better to cleanse society of its worst contaminations; a man may not do as he pleases, if his conduct is a peril to the physical well-being of his neighbours. On the whole, the population, which at first greatly resented the interference of the authorities, on the ground that a man has a right to be as filthy as he pleases within the precincts of his own dwelling, has gradually come into line with the dictates of common-sense, and is now not only willing to be controlled by wise supervision, but promptly joins in punishing those who still obstinately sin against the laws of social health. It is only those who are social pariahs, who have lost their self-respect and care not what becomes of themselves, who still continue to hold out against this great beneficent tide of sanitation which is rapidly transforming the conditions of civilised life.

Now let us apply this. It is quite as true of the soul as of the body that it is keenly sensitive to its environment, and very dependent for its health on the influences that surround it. Indeed, the body is not half so sensitive as the soul to its surroundings. The very nature of mind, feeling, will, makes the ego a most impressionable thing. All that we see, hear, feel, passes into our inmost being and works some change in us. It is a commonplace of moralists to say that we are never

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quite the same beings after the most trivial experience. It has made its mark ; it has left its sediment, its deposit within.

Therefore—and I should like to write that *therefore* very broad and deep on the minds of my fellow-beings—therefore, it is of the utmost importance that, so far as we can, we shall pay at least as much heed to our spiritual environment or surroundings as we do to our physical. If the body must be protected from contamination, surely so should the soul. If it is right to suppress physical nuisances, is it not still more right that spiritual nuisances shall not be allowed to flaunt their temptations before those who are so easily seduced to evil thought and impulse and deed as are most men and women—until, at least, they are made safe by higher means? So far as we can realise it personally, and so far as is possible to make it socially operative, the environment of our souls should be sanatised, made healthy, invigorating, health-giving and health-preserving.

Now, as regards that particular inner circle of influences that we call the home, we are all fairly alive to the importance of this duty. Into that innermost circle we never, if we can help it, allow soul-infections to enter. We guard our children's health, and we also guard their sensitive moral nature from the subtle poisons of the world. So far as we can safely do so, we even keep the knowledge of evil things from them lest the bloom be taken off their innocent natures by it. The rough winds of influence that we have to encounter we temper and soften and filter ere they

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reach our dear ones, so that they sicken not under their blight. As the bird lines her nest with soft and downy substances so that the feathers of her young ones may grow and their wings become strong enough to buffet stormy winds, so do we try, as far as in us lies, to make the home a soft and weather-proof shelter for the young souls entrusted to our keeping. This parental instinct may be carried to excess, but at least we should all fulfil it so far as wisdom prompts.

It is also the aim of the Church, as the spiritual home of the souls brought up within its pale, to furnish a healthy and cherishful environment for her children. Religious training and education should aim at safeguarding the young, the weak, the undeveloped, from the world's rough winds, and at forestalling the perilous temptations of life during the years of innocence and growth.

This spiritual function has been in times past construed in too narrow and limited a sense; but there are signs that a more catholic and comprehensive spirit is at work in that the Church is beginning to throw out her lines of protection still further and further round the intellectual and social, as well as the religious, nature of the young. This movement has its dangers, but it is in the right direction.

I wish we could say that society as a whole acted as wisely in showing the same care for men's spiritual interests. The remarkable thing is that whereas it is thoroughly sensible of the importance of physical sanitation, it is morbidly set against what we may call

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social sanitation. You can easily get men to pass laws making it penal for anyone to be a centre of infection to the neighbourhood, and they will promptly help to curtail his personal liberty in order to preserve the common health ; but what of those who live by spreading the poisons of such evils as drink, gambling, and social vice ? A milkman who sells milk contaminated with typhoid germs is promptly suppressed by the indignation of a suburb for his carelessness ; but what of the man who keeps a low music-hall ? What of the company that exploits a gin-palace to the detriment of the moral health of society ? At the least sign of a reforming spirit protests rise from the most unexpected quarters, that hoary axiom of the Englishman, " You are interfering with personal liberty," or that still worse cry, " You are tampering with a vested interest," are loudly raised. It would seem that once an evil influence has entrenched itself deeply in the fabric of society, it will find champions galore to defend it from those who would uproot it or stamp it down. Sunday licences, concerts, newspapers—we all know by how narrow a margin we were able a few years since to stem the rising tide by which the Lord's Day was being attacked, and even now it is doubtful if we have done more than arrest its progress for a time. This generation, politically and socially speaking, is far more alive to bodily contamination than to moral infections, and so physical sanitation is a fetish—people bow down and worship it ; whereas moral contamination is looked upon as a part of the inevitable lot of man which everyone must resist, if he can, for himself ; and if he cannot,

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well, he must just be sucked under and pitied and buried.

I know the arguments whereby the present order of things is being defended. "There cannot be moral character without moral discipline"—this is one of them. True, but the soul is weak, and needs guides and fences and bulwarks against evil in order to ward off its attacks. "Freedom to do wrong is one of the conditions to do right"—that is another. True; but coercion to wrong is a hindrance to doing right. "Those who mean to go wrong will go wrong"—here is a third. True; but is it not also true that "The sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done"? Alas, my good countrymen, there are thousands of helpless souls to-day who are perishing because the temptations to drink, to social vice, to gambling, to dishonesty which surrounded them were too many and too hard for them to resist under the circumstances. And there are thousands more of us who, if we had been put into the environment of some people would be possibly in a convict prison to-day, or tightly bound and manacled in the grip of habits which are a worse prison for the soul than any convict cell is for the body.

Now I have, I trust, as much love for liberty as any, and as jealous a regard for its proper maintenance, but I have greater love for the souls of men, and it is not till men come to value their own souls and the souls of others as they now do health and fresh air, that the era of true reform will begin. I do not look forward to the time when Parliament will attempt to make men moral and religious by force, but I do look for the

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time when society will come to see that it is its duty to make our streets clean from solicitations to vice and drink and gambling; when every hall of amusement will be maintained at least at the standard of decency; when vested interests like that of "the trade" will not be able to defy all attempts to reform it, and throw a Government out for attempting to deal with its abuses. A healthier public opinion must reign on this question if this country is not to go from bad to worse, and it is our duty to do what we can to mould that opinion.

Environment does not make a man, but environment can unmake him, and therefore the moral cleansing of social conditions is one of the first duties of a Christian community.

II

And so we come to a second condition of the prevention of evil—a *healthy, vitalised, sanatised soul*. It is well known that there are some people who are more liable to infection than others, and the reason is to be found in the weakness or strength of their constitution, or in the condition of their health at the time.

We may cleanse the environment, physical, social and religious, as much as we like, but we cannot do away with the possibility of disease and evil, for the germs of both are too subtle for us altogether to eliminate; they mingle with our food, they are embedded in our tissues and blood. There is only one safeguard that is perfectly sure against either form of poison, and that is health. If we are only strong enough and vigorous

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enough in constitution we can go through plague-stricken neighbourhoods, and dens of fever, and air loaded with the microbes even of the bubonic plague, and yet bear a charmed life. We shall "not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." For, as the physicians phrase it, we shall be "immune" to the poison.

III

There is, indeed, one important consideration which should make us far more eager and convinced in our spiritual than in our physical hygiene.

With the advance of the theory and practice of preventive medicine a strange modifying principle has been unexpectedly encountered. One of the most remarkable recent discoveries in biology has been the unfolding of the racial function of epidemic disease. It has been shown more or less conclusively that the present vigour of civilised races has been largely due to the winnowing effect of these diseases on their physique. When a plague devastates a country, the persons generally attacked and carried off by it have been the physically weak and inefficient members of society, and that generally when too young to become parents. In this way only those are left who are vigorous enough to have healthy offspring like themselves. It is clear that one of the effects of the more thorough methods of sanitation now in vogue has been the preservation of many infants and children who, being weakly, are less fit to continue the race and to carry on the physical

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evolution of mankind to a higher pitch of perfection. In time many of these become parents, and they naturally perpetuate their constitutional weaknesses in their children. It would therefore seem that our new science of prevention is weighted with this painful disadvantage—that it imperils the very efficiency which it aims at establishing, and lowers the average vitality of the communities in which it is most thoroughly carried out. It is even affirmed confidently by some biologists that there are already serious signs of physical deterioration in some of the foremost races, and that whereas the average age of infancy has advanced by leaps and bounds during the last half-century, the average age of those above seven years old has been slowly but surely declining. Thus strangely does Nature trim her balances and place a disability even on reform and progress. But in the spiritual life this disability has no place. When souls are revitalised, sanatised and strengthened in the inner man against falling into sin, they are not liable to interfere with the progress of the race in the pursuit of its highest interests. It is all gain, and gain for all, to save a soul from death; it is no less, but more, a gain to fill souls who have never fallen into open and flagrant sin with fresh stores of life and power, and so enable them to battle successfully with the forces of spiritual death. If we bring up our children in the fear of God and in the nurture of the Lord we make them centres of living power and radiant health to others around them and to the generation that comes after them. It is all gain, I say, and no loss, to keep men from falling into evil. For to become

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truly religious is to be revitalised from above, and to receive into the inner citadel of the soul the power of an "endless life." Therefore let us develop every preventive, preserving influence we can command, and turn it loose on the world that so sorely needs it, and which for lack of it will assuredly "go down into the pit." By so doing we shall save many a moral weakling from collapse, and prevent many bright and eager young spirits from falling into the way of perdition.

The programme of practical Christianity is an ellipse, whose major focus is the conversion of individuals, and whose minor is the regeneration of social conditions. The perfect curve of progress depends on these two principles being held in their due place and proportion. The redemptive function of religion, in other words, must be balanced and safeguarded by its preventive function. Then, ultimately, we shall have "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

XV

THE RELIGIOUS FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE

“Behold, the half was not told me.”—I KINGS x. 7.

THIS incident brings before us the penalties of a great reputation. When once a man rouses popular expectation, he is its slave. Every one of his acts must henceforth be titanic, every casual word must flash and smite like one of the bolts of Jupiter. Obscurity has this advantage, that it gives us a chance of being appraised at our worth, and even of occasionally surpassing our fame. “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown”—especially the laurel crown of fame. It is said of Edward Irving that when he burst like a comet on the theological horizon, his sudden reputation was a cruel surprise to him, for he instinctively felt that he could not maintain it; and many another man has lived to rue the morning when, like Lord Byron, he woke and found himself famous. Those who aspire to notoriety should be sure of their resources, otherwise they will rise only to fall, and their end will be worse than their beginning.

For it is not given to many to surpass a great reputation, as Solomon did in his contest of wit with the Queen of Sheba. That gifted woman came from afar to test the far-famed glories of the Hebrew monarch, and especially his reputed wisdom. We do not know

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the motives that impelled her in her quest ; probably they were mixed, as most human motives are. There is at least a suggestion of a certain feminine complexity in her temperament, for when she found that she had come upon a man whose greatness actually surpassed his fame, she was first sorry, for " there was no more spirit in her " ; and then she was glad, for she said, " Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which sit at thy table and continually hear thy wisdom. And blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee to put thee on the throne of Israel : because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice." It is to the credit of this queenly woman, however, that her admiration outgrew her envy ; and her grateful homage took the shape of warm praise and costly gifts. There is an exchange of Eastern diplomatic courtesies between the king and his royal visitor, and having duly paid her homage, the Queen of Sheba returned to her own country a wiser and—probably—a chastened woman.

And now, having touched on this interesting and famous meeting of ancient and royal wits—a meeting that has figured in many a happy legend and historical picture—I am going to take leave of it abruptly. The Queen of Sheba said that, for all the greatness of Solomon's fame, it was as nothing to his deserts ; even the exaggerations of Eastern hyperbole were powerless to repress it. And she said to the king, " It is a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it : and lo, behold, the

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half was not told ; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." It is not often, as I have said, that language fails to do justice to human greatness ; but there are certain great, ultimate realities in the universe of God of which it is true that the half of their glory hath never been told ; which soar so high above the reach of language, and even the wing of thought, that, try as we will to compass their scope, or dive into their depths, their meaning perpetually eludes us. Our subject is the great mysteries of life, of nature, of God and man, Revelation, Incarnation, Atonement—in a word, of Religion—and the inadequacy of language to deal with them fully ; and from this inadequacy I want to draw some practical lessons of great importance in these days of religious stress and theological controversy.

I

And first let me try to make clear what language is, and its function in relation to thought. Language is a distinctively human endowment, and its place is to form a bridge between one mind and another, so that the ideas, emotions, and intentions of one man may become known to his fellows, and that all may share the mind of each. Now, thoughts are, primarily, the reproductions of things ; and since, in the far-off ages when language was first evolved, men's thoughts were almost exclusively of their physical surroundings and needs, we find the fundamental words of every language are names of material objects or of the impressions made by them on the primitive, childlike mind. And when man's mental horizon widened, and his grasp of abstract ideas

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strengthened, instead of inventing new names for these higher operations of his mind, he linked each abstract thought to a physical symbol, and used for the purpose the words already in vogue. It would surprise some of us, if we studied the matter, to find what a large proportion of our intellectual, moral and religious vocabulary has physical roots. "Right means straight; spirit means wind; transgression, the crossing of a line; supercilious, the lifting of an eyebrow." We still use the word heart to denote not only the physical organ, but the abstract emotions of love; and the word head, not only for that part of the body, but for the intellectual processes which are supposed to go on within it. I might go on indefinitely to show how our most abstruse terms, if their branches and leaves stretch into the ether of "pure" thought, have their roots firmly grounded in the common earth of sensation from which they spring.

And here we have the first suggestion of both the beauty and the imperfection of language as a vehicle of mind. It is beautiful because, by the use of natural imagery, we employ Nature as a symbol of the spiritual world of which she is the antechamber, or as an index-finger, pointing away from herself into the deeper mysteries of the spiritual world. Language helps us to realise that these mountains and clouds, these trees and flowers, this earth, sky, sea, still have more to say when they have told us all about their physical properties. They speak of a subtler essence than can be analysed in a chemist's retort, of a deeper reality than the matter which forms their basis and superstructure. To the spiritually-minded, every slab of rock has its

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Ten Commandments inscribed upon it ; every landscape thrills with the subtle whisper heard by Goethe, who makes the Time Spirit in *Faust* say :

“ In the roaring loom of Time I ply,
Weaving the garment thou seest Him by.”

Words are the symbol of spirit, and every natural object they connote is a letter of some divine word. Thus the more clearly we have it proved to us that language is sense-born, the more spiritual are its uses seen to be ; for leaf, bud, fruit, horizon-line, mountain-masses, the foam of ocean waves, the eternal stars that blossom nightly in the skies, are one vast illuminated scroll on which, in letters of crimson and gold, green and midnight blackness, is spread the message of the Eternal. There is a fine passage in one of Emerson's essays which bears suggestively on this subject. He is dealing with the great advantage the country possesses over the town for the education and nourishment of a powerful mind. “ We know more from Nature than we can at will communicate. Its light flows into the mind evermore, and we forget its presence. The poet, the orator, bred in the woods, whose senses have been nourished by their fair and appeasing changes, year after year, without design and without heed, shall not lose their lesson altogether in the roar of cities, or the broil of politics. Long thereafter, amidst agitation and terror—in national councils, in the hour of revolution, these solemn images shall reappear in their morning lustre, as fit symbols of the thoughts which the passing events shall awaken. At the call of a noble sentiment, again the woods wave, the pines murmur,

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the river rolls and shines, the cattle low upon the mountains, as he saw and heard them in his infancy. And with these forms, the spells of persuasion, the keys of power, are put into his hands." The man in becoming eloquent becomes figurative, and his figures and illustrations become points of flame which set the minds of his audience aglow with his emotion and incandescent with his thought.

But now, if the physical basis of language is a part of its beauty and its power, it is also a source of its weakness. There is no philosopher who does not acknowledge that matter and mind are the most widely sundered realities in the universe. The spiritual and the material are at opposite poles of our experience. Yet we have to use the one not only to illustrate but to express the other. The spiritual has to clothe itself in a material image in order to be communicable at all. Our souls are like prisoners in the cell of sense, able to communicate with each other only through narrow loopholes of eye and ear. And so in dealing with the deep realities of the spirit we are never able to express exactly what we think and feel. Every great sentence is an unsuccessful effort to body forth an elusive thought in words too clumsy to hold it. Always more is meant than meets the ear. By the magnetism of sympathy we are able for the most part to follow out the suggestions of each other's speech, and see whither it points; but it is a difficult and uncertain process. And in moments of deep passion or high exaltation I think we all know what it is to be baffled in trying to convey our deepest and best thought to others. We feel like

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Titans who have strength and passion enough to sport with the hills and to fling mountains at one another, but who can lay their hands on nothing better than a handful of pebbles on which to exercise their muscle. So much greater is sense than body, so much finer is spirit than matter! Human language can no more compass the spiritual riches and vastness of life than a narrow inlet can contain the ocean. All we can say is that the ocean lies behind the bay; all we can do is to invite each other to launch our bark across its heaving waters, far beyond the soundings of words, or the shoreline of language—out where the heaven of infinity is above us, and the tides of eternity are beneath us, and the breath of the Spirit that “bloweth where it listeth” fills our sail.

And so I might go on to show, by one line of example after another, how it is that in spiritual matters—where the mysteries of the soul, and God, and the life eternal brood darkly within and around us—when we have done what we can to compass them in thought and describe them in words, “the half hath not been told.” Far beyond our reach still stretch the heaving waters, still breaks the eastern dawn, still rise the everlasting snows. When all is done to express the spiritual and Divine background of life, we can but whisper to ourselves, “Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him! but the thunder of His power who can understand?”

But I must come to the practical part of my subject. Let us, then, take for granted as proved—what I have been able only to suggest—that language, being made

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up primarily of only the materials of sense, is but a clumsy instrument of thought at best, and that it is totally inadequate to express the full meaning of spiritual realities, becoming more and more inadequate the nearer we come to the central truths of religion. If this is fairly clear, some important conclusions follow.

II

The first conclusion we are led to is this—we can understand the great difference between the clear results of scientific thought and the uncertain and debatable questions that still try us in our theologies.

The plain man—he who is now usually called the “man in the street”—and the scientific thinker are constantly throwing it up to us theologians and preachers, that while they see their way so clearly in practical things, and in dealing with the laws of matter, we never seem to quite agree for long about anything. That is quite true, but the inference which they draw is wrong. If religious thought dealt with material realities, our conclusions about it would be as clear, I suppose, as the rule of three or the theorems of Euclid. But it deals not with matter, which provides the basis of language, but with spirit, which can only use the clumsy instrument lent to it as best it may. This being so, it is unreasonable to expect the same exactitude of thought in theology as in science. We are battling with realities too big for us, and that with weapons forged in a furnace too cold for the work. Why not, then, as the agnostic bids us do, leave this dim, uncertain region severely alone, and confine

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ourselves to what we can see and handle and measure? Because, for one thing, we cannot do so. These larger, nobler, finer realities of religion hold us in a tremendous grasp; they permeate the soul, they shake us with their passion, they lure us on with their unspeakable beauty, they command us to follow in a voice we dare not disobey. Man, it is true, is made for science, for he is the creature of time and space; and we know something of his surroundings, and it is well. But still more, man is made for religion, for he is the child of eternity, and in the mighty things of the spirit we find our truest and highest life; and so, even at the cost of being condemned to an endless quest, we must battle with the mystery which is also the glamour of religion. And we cannot leave spiritual realities alone for another reason. For in this higher quest and battle there is a supreme reward. Here swing and sway the waves of that "immortal sea that brought us hither" into "this bourne of time and place," and on them presently we must again voyage to other and higher climes. Here are the supreme problems and hopes and aspirations of our soul. In this dim, tremendous region we find our truest selves, we find each other, we find God, our Maker and Redeemer. And in wrestling with the realities of religion, the soul grows, realises its true self, comes to its own, makes progress in all that is holy and good, as in no other way. To refuse to enter on this noble quest because it is difficult, or to tread that path because it is tangled, or to climb those heights of thought and aspiration because they are perilous, is to give up our birthright of greatness, and to sink into a

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prehistoric condition which would be spiritual atavism run mad. Religion is for man, and man is for religion, and it is his highest privilege, as it is his hardest task, to do what he can to make himself at home in it ; first as a disciple, then as a thinker ; first living it, then translating it into coherent (though never into exhaustive) thought. And, therefore, we will persevere in this perplexing, difficult, fascinating business of religion ; we will ever seek this highest wisdom ; we will " follow the gleam " of spiritual truth whithersoever it may lead us, even though we faint and fall and die by the way.

2. And here I would point out an obvious but perpetual snare that lies in the path of all religious thinkers. That is, the danger of thinking that anyone can reach finality in theologic thought.

How often has this warning been forgotten, or not even recognised ! It is the besetting sin of theologians, and of Church councils, and of all system-mongers, to imagine that they have reached the ultimate goal of religious certainty. Too often, in their hurry to reach religious rest, they have treated the high subject-matter of theology—God, the soul, personality, atonement—as if it could be tabulated like the contents of a museum. But museums are for dead things, not for living souls. Then, because some brother more far-sighted than themselves has described his glimpse into their vast and manifold meanings in language slightly different from theirs, they have excommunicated him, and called him a heretic. They have treated the Bible like a scientific text-book, instead of a library of poems, and visions,

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and narratives and devout meditations—the story of the Divine Spirit struggling through the thick fogs of humanity into a clear manifestation of Himself. They have built the key-words of Revelation into Church articles, and mortised Paul's flaming perorations into the dry walls of their creeds. Ever has the human spirit burst these bounds in its reach after a larger truth ; still, age by age, new bounds have been set, and new creeds been framed, till the course of Christian history has been, like the valley of dry bones, peopled with the skeletons of defunct theologies.

Let creeds have their place. Let them rise as spontaneous utterances of the common faith of Christian communities—as the changing forms of the ever living and growing tree of truth. But directly they claim to be more ; directly, to change the figure, they profess to be other than the high-water marks of devout thought, and to be binding on the mind and heart of living men, they become dams, keeping back the swelling tide ; they are prison walls that exclude the light and air. Looked at in this their larger meaning, the creeds of history take new significance for us. Instead of despising them, or turning impatiently away from them, we learn to value them. By denying their false authority we come to see that they are headlands on the voyage to the absolute truth ; they show the shore-lines of the great continent of spiritual reality ; they are the points of view where the soul of man paused again and again to register its progress and measure the miles of its journey. From this point of view I feel with Horace Bushnell, to whose noble dissertation on the " Nature of Language "

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I would refer you for much suggestive thought, that, so far from refusing to sign any creed, it would be easier to sign all creeds, on the ground that they each and all contain some aspects of the truth of God which are vital and good. Take, for instance, the theories of Atonement. Which of these laborious efforts to compass its divine mystery satisfies the heart of a devout believer? Who that has felt the *reality* of the Cross but must turn away from each "theory" in turn, feeling that there are undiscovered continents of precious truth in that divine sacrifice still untraversed by human thought, and depths of meaning and helpfulness in it as yet unsounded by bard or seer or "prophet of the soul"? Shall we for that reason reject them all? Nay, rather let us master them all, realising that when all is done that we can do to understand the Cross, its rugged arms outreach all our theories, for in that narrow strait between two seas of sin and love are locked the conflicting currents of heaven and hell, whose fierce strife no man can measure. The more I read about it and the more I dwell upon it in the silence and worship of my heart, the poorer seem to me to be all attempts made to exhaust its mysterious meaning, the more deeply I feel that when the best thought of the ages concerning it has been weighed there is a better apprehension of it in my heart than anyone, least of all myself, can express, and that "the half hath not been told." Least of all can I bear with anyone who professes to reduce the mystery into a "simple" statement, and claims that he has crystallised that mystery into a single formula. For him, let it be

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so; as for me and for many others we will remain at the foot of that Cross and whisper in our hearts :

“ Lo, God is here ; let us adore,
And own how dreadful is this place.”

The explanation of the moment will pass ; the mystery of redemption, with its lights and shadows, its appalling heights and depths, will remain, to lure and torment and satisfy the souls of unborn ages with its incommunicable secret and its saving power.

The only worthy attitude towards the great mysteries of the spiritual life, then, is one of humility. The simplest may understand something of them—“ I thank Thee, O Father, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes ”—yet the wisest cannot understand them altogether. This is not meant as a check on intellectual enterprise, nor as the justification of obscurantism and mental indolence. Let such as are qualified to do so exercise their highest powers to express and to systematise their thoughts on religion ; in doing this there is great reward. But let no man, because he thinks he sees one aspect of the truth clearly and forcibly, ignore the fact that at his best he can see but a part of the whole, and that what he sees may not be what others see, and that what they see clearly may be dark to him. Least of all let him dogmatise, and belittle those who disagree with him. Let us all try to get what we can through personal vision, and what we can from the vision of others, remembering that when all have said their say, old theologians and new theologians, orthodox and heretics, broad Church, narrow Church, high Church and low

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Church, the "half hath not been told." We inherit much from the past, and we owe much to the present; but there is plenty of room for unborn generations to discover in the deep things of God.

3. A word in conclusion to the "plain man." Where does he come in in this big, wide, mysterious world of religious thought? He has had no training in exact thinking; he is no logician; he has no time, and less inclination, to dive into the perplexing problems of theology. Yet he has his place and function in religion. For it is his business to live great truths even though he may not be able to understand them. He may have a reasonable faith, even though he may not be able to give full reasons for his faith. And we must always remember that but for the plain, ordinary, devout, and more or less unthinking Christian man or woman the theologian's occupation would be gone. For it is the common everyday religious experience and consciousness that provide the theologian with his material. Always life must precede thought; experience must provide the basis for theory; conduct must antedate, inspire, and correct doctrine. What is valuable and essential is what is common to all, not what is peculiar to the few, and out of the warp and woof of the everyday feelings and doings of devout men and women everything real in thought, everything true in theory, everything really helpful in doctrine must come.

Therefore, let us all live the life. Let us put religion to the test. Let us "follow the gleam." Let us pray and wrestle and fight with temptation. Let us in the strength of God and by His redeeming grace follow

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Jesus, and put His promises to the proof. Then will the light of life slowly dawn on our troubled vision; and though here we shall never lay all the spectres of the mind, nor come to absolute understanding or certainty about the things of God, life will ever be an expanding vision, a broadening road, a rising path, a deepening satisfaction. And when at last, "earth's journey done, heaven's guerdon won," we shall pass from faith into sight, and lose our shadows in the glory of God's eternal presence, even then there will be height beyond height, and horizon beyond horizon, to beckon the soul onward. I believe, and I thank God for being able to do so, that even eternity will not exhaust the mystery of God's being and truth and love; but that though we sing His praise and wisdom and power and grace to endless ages, even then "the half shall not be told."

XVI

THE SURVIVAL OF THE UNFIT

“A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.”—MATT. xii. 20.

THE passage here, from the 18th to the 21st verses, is a free transcript from the prophecies of Isaiah, and corresponds in a marvellous way to the character and work of the Saviour. The central feature of it lies in the clear presentation of His crowning function—the saving of the downtrodden, unheeded, dying elements in human life by means of quiet, unostentatious, but potent spiritual forces. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ created the most extraordinary moral revolution the world has ever seen. For the reign of brute force He substituted the sovereignty of gentleness. Instead of justifying the dominion of the strong He proclaimed the emancipation of the weak; He took the diadem from the head of severity and placed it on the brows of pity; He unbound Love from her fetters and greeted her as Queen of the Universe, the Vicegerent of God, the joy of the whole earth. The words of my text form a true climax to this picture of the emancipating, healing, redeeming Christ. It may be called the law of spiritual survival in its most ultimate form—the *Survival of the Unfit*. Perhaps there is no phrase that more entirely condenses into four words the work of

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Christianity according to Christ. The material scientist boldly speaks of it as a reproach ; but in this, as in another case, the "reproach of Christ will prove to be better than the treasures of Egypt." The significance and beauty of this aspect of the Gospel will form a fitting subject for our consideration.

We will deal first with the Law of Survival superseded by Christ ; secondly, with the Law of Survival which He introduced ; and lastly, we will attempt to justify it as the highest and best revealed by God to man.

I

The Law of Survival which Christ superseded by His Gospel is that which has of late years had a brilliant exposition in the works of Darwin and his successors, though it is as old as life and as universal as death. It is variously named "the survival of the fittest," "the conquest of the fit," "natural selection," "selection by death," and so on. Let me briefly describe its action.

In all the kingdoms and orders of life on earth, there has been noted an extraordinary, and till recently an unsurpassed, fertility. Living creatures tend to multiply at a prodigious rate, and if their rate of increase were not somehow kept in check, they would in a few generations overpopulate the world and utterly outgrow all possible means of subsistence. The result is what is called the great struggle for existence which is everywhere going on. There is no room for all, and so only a certain proportion survive. Of vegetable seeds not one in a hundred finds a suitable soil and grows to perfection ;

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of insects, probably not one in a thousand; of the higher creatures probably on the whole not one in a score. And naturally, where so much struggle goes on, the victory is to the strong, the healthy, the efficient. It is as though through all the vast domains of Nature an invisible sentinel stood, watching the teeming millions of living creatures as they are born and grow, judging with minutest accuracy the claims of each to live and continue its species, and executing a stern sentence of extinction on such as are weighed in the balance of organic efficiency and found wanting.

The most impressive feature of this law at first sight is its apparent pitilessness. It has no bowels of compassion for the weak and ailing. In all the lower realms of life—in all, indeed, without exception, except the human—the action of this principle is so searching and so certain that nothing escapes its scrutiny. There is something of omniscience about its insight, something of omnipotence about its resourcefulness in executing its will. No creature can appeal to a higher court from the decisions of this law. If it fulfils the test of fitness, it lives, and all things “work for good” to it; if it fails to meet that test it is, sooner or later, sure to be slain and carried out to burial. Salvation of the fit, by the extinction of the unfit—that is the one supreme law of Nature. She knows no other.

At first, as I have just said, this law gives the impression of blind and unreasoning cruelty. It is as though the guardianship of the living world had been handed over to the care of a Demiurge without a heart, a Frankenstein monster invested with an iron will and

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terrible resources, but incapable of a throb of kindness, a qualm of remorse. But as we enter more deeply into the question this feeling largely passes away. Natural selection, if it is ruthless in its methods, is entirely beneficent in its results. It ensures that no living creature shall survive unless it is capable of living a fairly strong, vigorous and happy life. It gives the advantage to such creatures as can profit most by the chances of existence. Those that are killed off are destroyed with a minimum of pain for the most part; at least their pangs are short and merciful compared with what they would be if they were permitted to survive and carry on a weak, ailing and hungry existence. To the creature that is not fit to live and thrive, death is a merciful release.

Then, it is a striking fact that we owe almost all the variety, the beauty, the development of the living world to the action of this seemingly pitiless law. The bright plumage of birds and butterflies, the manifold tints and shades of flowers, the endless lines of beauty, of strength, of grace in the higher animals are all the fruit of "natural selection." And it ensures that there shall be no useless organs, no superfluous parts, no waste of tissue and vital strength in any normal creature of God's hand. The song, the charm, the swiftness, the suppleness, the resourcefulness of Nature are all due to the same cause. However hard it may appear that any living thing should die before its life is completely lived, we should never have been privileged to see such a wealth of loveliness, such vital health, joy and progress in the organic world, but for this law.

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Death and destruction thus wait on life as its servants ; they wipe out the failures, and gather up the withered fragments of the great tree of life to a quick and decent burial.

And man, who stands at the head of Nature, is physically and mentally the finest product of natural selection. Nature has climbed up to him along a blood-stained stairway, but her triumph has been complete. And though in man the law of struggle has been modified by another and higher law, it is still at work in him also. The struggle for existence has not ceased. We have to fight for our living, to struggle for our place in the world, to work out our own social salvation with fear and trembling, and it is good for us that we have to do so, within certain limits. The strife and tumult of human society is not all evil in its results. It ensures that on the whole the best and most efficient men and women should come to the front, and have their due opportunity. Healthy emulation is good ; it adds plot-interest and charm to life ; it means that those best qualified to lead shall do so and that those who can only follow shall follow. In many directions this struggle for existence, for place, for power, for influence, is the best education for mind and character, for body and soul. The human mind has evolved to its present pitch of perfection by exercising itself against the brute forces of the world ; and the strife of nations and communities has resulted in the manifold enrichment and expansion of civilised life. It would not be good for us if all need for struggle were to cease, and life brought us all our desires without effort or pain. Even in the spiritual

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world, we have to strive, to agonise, to fight for our place—

“ And he who flags not in the earthly strife,
From strength to strength advancing—only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won
Mounts, and that hardly, to Eternal life.”

II

But it is clear, on further consideration, that this law of survival is by itself not enough. It does not meet our deepest need, our ultimate hunger, our last great cry.

Physical life, in the brute, is a good thing only in so far as it can be happily, efficiently, gloriously spent. When it is not fit to be lived, let the creature mercifully die and make room for its betters!

And if we were body and no more, it would be so for us likewise. If there was one end to man and to the beast, let both die when life is not worth living, and let the ailing, the diseased, the beaten in the struggle turn their faces to the wall in decent resignation, and so pass into kindly oblivion.

But man is not a mere brute, and he must not treat himself as if he were, nor other men as though they were brutes. He is a moral, a spiritual being. There is that in him which fills him with hunger for a higher life than that of the body, following loftier laws, and demanding a kindlier consideration. The dawn of the soul was the first great advent, linking something with the bodily life of infinite preciousness and promise; the coming of Christ was the second and greater advent, linking man's soul and man's body “with a truth divine.” Between the two advents came the sorrow and failure of sin,

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making Christ's coming doubly needful lest man's soul and body be merged in a common ruin. And what Christ did was to prepare the way for the new law of survival, which was to supersede the old, by making clear two great principles.

First, He taught that the soul of every man, however diseased, degraded, or hopeless its condition, was something of infinite preciousness in the sight of God. A diseased animal, a creature unfit to live,—let it perish, lest it cumber the ground and propagate its disease and its unfitness to other generations. But a diseased soul—that was something too precious to be lost in the wastes of death, something worth heart's blood to redeem, something calling for infinite sacrifice in proportion to its infinite worth. This was the new revelation of Jesus Christ. Men had treated "lost" souls as though they had surrendered their right to live; they had even treated souls that were not "lost" as of varying value according to their mental or moral standing, or even according to their outward condition. Jesus boldly announced that let a soul be utterly degraded, altogether beyond all human hope of recovery, it is just as dear to its Maker,—that there is something in man's spiritual nature beyond the reach of sin to destroy, and that He had come to make known God's undying, unconquerable love for it, however low it might fall, however surrounded by shameful conditions it might be. By His matchless parables of grace, by His courageous friendship with the outcast classes, and, supremely, by His unspeakable sacrifice on the Cross, He planted deep in the future consciousness of the

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world a sense of the immeasurable worth of the soul. The world has often tried to forget this revelation, but it has never succeeded in doing so; nor is it likely to do so while the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son, and the redeeming voice of Calvary, send forth their irresistible appeal.

2. Jesus, by doing so much, did more. If each and every soul is of such value and worth, irrespective of its condition, then it follows that the interests of a single soul are too great and too sacred to be sacrificed for the interests of any other.

See where this leads us. In the region of the natural life, the many are sacrificed for the few; ninety-nine creatures perish in order to give the hundredth a better chance of life; whole communities of lower creatures are sacrificed as food for a single member of a higher kingdom. There is nothing wrong here—only a seeming waste. But the world had applied, and in many directions still applies, this measurement to human life also. The few have exploited the many for their own benefit; armies have perished to feed the vanity of a single woman or the ambition of one man; the higher interests of whole communities have been sacrificed for the selfish ease of the rich and the powerful; and the world has been full of sin and sorrow and suffering in consequence. Against this the Incarnation of the Son of God, the teaching of the New Testament, the witness of the Church of Christ have ever entered a glorious and perpetual protest. The spiritual interests of one soul outweigh the wealth, the culture, the civilisation of the ages—that is the teaching of the Gospel. Put the whole wealth of the world into

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one scale, and the meanest soul that breathes in the other, and the world will kick the beam.

III

But do not let us be led astray even by a precious and saving truth. The passion of Christ for souls does not mean that all souls are to Him equally dear, or that they are in their actual condition of equal value in God's holy sight. There is an unmeasured distance between the good and the bad, the saint and the sinner, the soul that is being saved to eternal life and the soul that is writhing in the throes of the second death. God's love for those who are spiritually lost and perishing does not ignore moral distinctions. The survival of the unfit would else be a shameful and wicked doctrine. The preciousness of the worst souls is founded not on their actual condition, but on *their capacity for redemption*. Christ treated the lost not as saved, but as recoverable. He will not break the bruised reed, because there is life in it still. He will not quench the smoking flax, because the spark may even yet be fanned into a flame.

Let me put the same truth in another way.

In the organic world, life is conserved by *economy*, by sacrificing the *many* for the *few*, by sweeping away the superfluous and the unfit that the fit may have room. But in the spiritual world, life is conserved by *enrichment*, by the sacrifice of the good for the bad, so that the bad may become good. The wise do not desire to destroy the foolish, but to share their wisdom with them, so that they may cease to be foolish; the strong in spiritual character do not wish to oust the weak, but

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to lend them the contagion of their own moral strength ; the holy do not seek to eliminate the vicious and depraved, but to raise them by sympathy and helpfulness to their own level. The wisest, the strongest, the holiest being who ever lived on earth was Jesus Christ, and His passion and joy was to enrich the mind, gird up the will, and transform the soul of the meanest, weakest, worst man who ever breathed. "I came not to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance"; "I am come that ye may have life, and have it abundantly"; "A bruised reed will He not break, smoking flax will He not quench." His gospel is thus not a gospel of judgment, but of rescue; "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be *saved*." And if since His time the wise and the noble and the holy have awakened to the splendid truth that the most abandoned people are worth trying to save; if they have sacrificed the lower good of this world gladly and eagerly in order that they may share the higher good with those who have it not; if pity has quickened their steps to help, and love has made them strong to redeem, it has all been because of Him who first let loose the stream of redemption into the world, and died, "the just for the unjust." It is this contagion of the Spirit of Christ that has built every orphanage, every asylum, every reformatory and rescue-home ever raised, and been the inspiration of every philanthropic movement that has ever been started. It is this that has humanised the rigours of government and softened the asperities of law, and is turning men from glorifying war and its

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horrors into sincere lovers of peace. It is this that is now beginning to draw the attention of the public mind to a sense of the social injustice and inequality that still prevail, and which is one of the disquieting by-products of the civilisation of which in other directions we are so proud. The infinite value of the human soul at its lowest is the inspiring principle of all reform, the central inspiration of all social and political progress. The battle is no longer to the strong, nor the race to the swift, in this world of whirling forces and complicated tyrannies. The evangel of pity is rising like a dawn in the darkness of the struggle; and even the brute self-seeking passions of society are beginning to lose their savagery under the spell of love's sweet music. We do not know how long the "ape and tiger" will take to die in our nature, but we do know that the kingdom of heaven, which is the kingdom of helpfulness, has begun to come, that the social centre of gravity has begun to shift from selfishness to altruism, and that men are slowly learning to think of the weaker brother and the erring sister, and to realise that the world is not meant to be the monopoly of the strong, the rich, the wise, the efficient, but that these must share their resources with those who cannot hold their own without help.

Thus the higher law vindicates itself over the lower. That realised its results by elimination, this by renewal and enrichment. The Law of Natural Selection was an aristocratic law: it preserved and justified the struggle of the few against the many, the better in ousting the worse. The Law of Spiritual Survival is a

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democratic law: it preserves the many, who are mostly weak, against the few, who are strong and often pitiless; nay, it aims at lifting the many into the regal position of the few. The old law swept the inefficient away as unfit to live: the new law pours life into their failing hearts and makes them fit to live. The old law was physical, the new law is ethical, and as man is ethical more than physical, it meets his noblest nature and fills his deepest need.

All praise to the Saviour who first revealed the Law of Spiritual Survival, and who made it the operative law of His kingdom of love, and who by His sacrifice of Himself, the just for the unjust, the holy One for the sinful, the everliving One for those wandering in the shadows of death, opened the door of heaven so wide that the poorest and the meanest of mankind, by the transfiguration of His grace, may be made worthy to enter into the joy of his Lord! "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory."

XVII

GOD'S POEMS

"For we are His workmanship (His *poem*) created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—EPHES. ii. 10.

THERE are twenty-six Hebrew and Greek words used for work, act, a thing done, performance, workmanship in the Old and New Testaments, some of which are repeated many times. This word here is used only once, and in this passage. The usual Greek word in the New Testament for workmanship, a something made or accomplished by any one, is *ἔργον*, or *πρᾶγμα*—but here we have the word *ποίημα*. That is to say, Christian men and women are God's special workmanship—*His poems*.

There is significance in this careful choice of language on the part of the apostle. He has a particular reason for choosing and using this word here, and here especially.

St. Paul is dealing with the contrast between the man of the world, the "natural man," who walks according to the "lusts of the flesh," and in "the spirit of disobedience,"—and the Christian man, who has been "quicken'd" out of his trespasses and sins and "raised up with Christ" into "newness of life." The contrast is great, and striking, and final. The difference between the one type of man and the other is the difference between the flesh and the spirit; between a state of wrath and alienation from God, and a state of reconciliation and peace and childlike dependence; between a

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thing spoiled and gone astray and marred, and a thing restored in the way of perfection ; between, in a word, *death and life*. God *made* bad men as well as good men ; but *bad* men are His spoiled work, their faculties debased, their sensibilities poisoned, their spiritual nature choked under an accumulation of trespasses and sins ; but *good* men are His “ new creation ” in Christ Jesus, the mischief undone, the damage repaired ; and these are *God's poems*. Let us see where this beautiful word leads us.

I

A poem is the result of a *creative act*, and the Christian man according to the New Testament, is the result of a special spiritual creative act on the part of God's Holy Spirit.

The word “ poem ” comes from ποιέω, “ I make, create ” ; and the poet in Greek was called by that name because he was credited with a spark of the divine creative energy. He is the *maker*, in the sense of *originator*. He sees into the heart of things, catches the first rays of dawn on the eastern hill-tops, feels the first tremor of great impulses, ideas, motives : and out of this primordial stuff he creates forms of splendour in words of rhythmical loveliness ; flashing on the purblind eyes and dull brains of common men the perfect symmetries of the Beautiful, the True, and the Good. The poet originates what others of lower order can only recognise, remember and live upon. It is easy to repeat a poem, but—to *make* one ? That is the miracle : only the man of creative gift can do that. Many of us

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can write *verses*, but the genius, the creative mind alone can write *poems*.

There is no doubt whatever that St. Paul uses the word *poiema* here in this sense. God fashions men—body, mind, spirit—as ever, out of the dust of the earth, according to the laws of generation and heredity; it is an act that is repeated from generation to generation, through the normal action of vital forces. But in the *New Birth* there is always a special, supernatural, personal act of creation on the part of the Holy Spirit. We were all born in the natural or physical sense, as others have been born, since the beginning of the race; but in the spiritual sense, we are born again in our own right, and through the immediate touch of the Divine Being who is our Father. We have fathers and mothers in the physical sense ranging in serial order back to the first man; but in the spiritual sense we belong to the order of Melchisedek. We are the sons and daughters of God only. We inherit from our earthly parents our physical constitution and form, our mental characters and powers, our outward possessions and fortunes; but we cannot inherit their religion. That comes from Him who made us for Himself, and who touches us into life, and makes us inheritors of the Kingdom of God by the immediate influence and power of His Spirit. “You did He quicken” “but God being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, quickened us together with Christ.”

This great truth is in the forefront of the New Testament teaching. It meets us everywhere; it is the perpetual refrain that sounds through the music of the

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Gospel. But it is not a truth that is universally believed even by those who profess to accept the Christian Faith.

And yet how this truth is borne in upon us by experience on all hands! How impossible, for instance, it is to transmit to our children the faith that is in our own hearts! We teach them our principles of conduct, our ideal of life; we do our utmost to influence them for good; we lead them by the hand to the feet of the great Master; and we pray earnestly for them. And that is all we can do. After all our agony of desire for their conversion, we are still spectators; we are still outside the circle; we can only watch and wait. For it is of the essence of religion that it is a personal affair. It is an inward, ultimate, hidden thing, that comes to birth in the deeps of being. Morality is a relation common to all men; it is an outward code, a regulative list of duties which it is possible in a sense to force on others, so as to compel their obedience. Religion is a thing that is in common only between those who have been inwardly quickened by the Spirit of God. In that act we stand apart from everybody else; there is no scope for compulsion nor even for corporate action here; it is an act of individual conviction, a free movement of personal self-surrender, which concerns the individual soul and God alone. The awakened, quickened soul feels itself to be a true *poiēma*, a creation, a poem of God.

Ever more deeply do I feel the absolute need of this act of quickening in men ere they can be Christians in the real sense. We must be born anew, *from above*, or we shall not see the Kingdom of God. The mere religion of habit, tradition, imitation, is no religion at all. The

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sacred creative flame must descend which transforms habit into inspiration, tradition into conviction, outward imitation of goodness into inward *love* of goodness. This is the change that makes Christians, and there is no other fact that can take its place. It may be a sudden change, making all things new, as in the case of Paul and Augustine and Luther, by a kind of instantaneous and all-compelling flash of insight; or it may be a slow and steady and insensible growth, as in the case of multitudes of the best men, in which the soul awakens by imperceptible stages into the possession of the "great reality." The *how* matters nothing; the fact is everything. "You hath He quickened."

II

But this is only the beginning of the creative act which makes us *God's poems*. The word suggests not only creation, but a special kind of creation. A poem has form as well as substance, and the condition of poetic success is that while the thought must be true, the form must be *rhythmic and beautiful*.

This beauty of form and expression is essential to a true poem. The idea must be enshrined in words linked in fit sequence, and disposed in ways pleasing to eye and ear and mind. This is the difference between prose and poetry: in prose the form is subordinate to the sense; in the latter the form is at least co-ordinate with the sense. This is art, whether in sculpture or painting or music or poetry—that idea and form should be studied in their perfect relations. What music is to

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sound, poetry is to language. It is beautiful, or it is not poetry.

Can we doubt that this thought lies hidden in the use of this lovely word as applied to the Christian life?

What makes a Christian? A regenerated soul, we say; conversion; the awakening of the soul from spiritual death unto spiritual life. And that is true, but it is only a part of the truth. "We are His poems, created unto good works." There is form as well as substance here; there is a character as well as a life; and the idea is that the Christian character embodies a renewed life in a certain fit and commendable form. If it is truly Christian it is not only a real and true thing; it is also a *beautiful* thing.

Here is surely one of the neglected truths of Christianity. The doctrine of the new birth is one of the commonplaces of the faith, however it may be misunderstood; but the doctrine of moral beauty as one of the essential attributes of the Christian character is so often forgotten that it is more often "honoured in the breach than in the observance." And for this reason, the element of moral beauty is often conspicuously absent in the character of many who at root are heartily loyal to their Master.

It is a disturbing fact that some of the best people in the world are anything but attractive and lovable; and some of the most attractive and lovable of people are far from being the best people or even good people. By some strange forgetfulness of such texts as this, it has come about that we somehow do not expect religion to make us beautiful in character. So many people

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who are right enough at heart are harsh and crabbed in manner, abrupt and ungenial in deportment; we could trust our lives into their hands, but we should not like to copy their manners; they have a trick of making their very virtues repellent. And then on the other side we come across people who offend our moral sense by what they are and do and say, and yet somehow there is a strange winsomeness about them. We cannot blame them as much as we would; they disarm our reprobation by the very air with which they do wrong; they have the faculty of making vice graceful, and sin enticing.

Now this is a most mischievous and deplorable fact, and it rises from having lost sight of one of the two hemispheres of goodness. Perhaps we owe this largely to our Puritan forefathers who were so driven into repulsion by the elegant vices of the court and the aristocracy of the day, that they deliberately stripped religion bare of all outward attractiveness, in order to show that there is something deeper than beauty in God's world, and that is *righteousness*. In doing this, however, they fell into the opposite extreme; and because others had made vice fascinating they made religion ugly. Their method was, "Be right, and never mind what others think of you; speak truth, and never mind how you say it; leave a good example behind you and do not trouble if it is unattractive, if only it is consistent." And this notion has somehow lingered on right into our own day, to the detriment of true religion and to the good of no one.

"Ye are *God's poems*." Fact and form must be in fit

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proportion ; we are not only to be good people, but good in a certain way, *i.e.*, in such a way as to show the inherent beauty and loveliness of goodness. Religion should sweeten our spirit, and put charm into our manner ; it should make our speech free of offence, helping us to speak the truth in love ; it should make our beliefs commendable to others, because our life adorns the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour ; it should make our characters delightful, because we are like Him who made people wonder at the grace which enabled Him to do "all things beautifully." We should endeavour to live—first, so that we may be inwardly right with God ; and, in the second place, so that we may draw others to Him by the winning quality of our rightness and goodness. "Let your light shine !"

Have you noticed how in Nature God always makes useful things beautiful, and beautiful things useful? Somehow, in most of his activities man has missed that divine grace. You cannot divide the uses of things from their beauty in the world as God made them ; there is a fitness that runs through everything, and which makes the world's charm. The flower has its use as well as its loveliness ; the mountain its grandeur as well as its strength. But man's useful things—his streets, his houses, his machinery, his canals—are often as ugly as they are useful ; and his beautiful things—his pictures, his statues, his architectural buildings—are often far from useful. And so we have to fly to Nature when we want to find the beauty which we lose in the ways of men, and whenever we come to Nature we find

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this schism between use and loveliness healed ; for, as it has been finely said, " Nature, while she labours as a machine, sleeps as a picture." The nearer we keep to Nature the more is this so.

" Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
Or dip thy paddle in the lake,
But it carves the bow of beauty there,
The ripples in rhymes the oar forsake."

" Ye are God's poems." Let us see to it that we are a part of Nature in this—that our goodness is attractive. Our principles must mould our conduct as the poet's thought moulds the language into which he puts it, making goodness beautiful and beauty good.

III

There is one other thought here. The apostle says, " For we are His workmanship (His *poem*), created in Christ Jesus unto *good* works, which God *afore prepared* that *we should walk in them*."

Here is an idea that I venture to think St. Paul has borrowed from the Greek philosopher Plato—that prose-poet of the true and beautiful. It was the Platonic belief that all beautiful ideas had an independent existence, that there was somewhere an ideal universe, in which the perfect pattern of everything existed in the divine mind in its flawless perfection, and that everything actual was but a poor and weak embodiment of that perfect form which existed thus in the spiritual world. And, further, it was the Platonic thought that we were made for these beautiful ideal things as they were made for us. When the poet, the prophet, the

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seer saw these beautiful things and described them, all men at once recognised them, and in thus recognising the true, the beautiful, and the good, they proved that we are ideally one with them. Have you never felt, on hearing for the first time a lovely poem, like Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" for instance, that there was something strangely familiar in it, as though you had heard it before, that you were renewing an old acquaintance which simply came back to you through the doorway of the poet's lyrical words?

Now consider—"Good works, as God *afore prepared* that we should walk in them." What does this mean? What but that the Christian excellences are but the fit and perfect expression of our ideal nature? What but that when we are Christlike we enter into possession of our *ideal selves*? The virtues that are enjoined upon us in the New Testament are not alien things, foreign to our nature; they are simply human nature raised to its highest and holiest possibilities.

"Ye are God's poems"—in the making. But, alas! there is untractable material in all of us. The difficulties which baffle the poet in his efforts to express his ideal thought in fit and rhythmic forms of language are as nothing to the difficulties which men and women present to the moulding, perfecting hand of the Great Poet of the Soul. We do not give ourselves into His shaping grace, and so at best we are like a stanza of poetry in which the rhythm is lame and the rhymes are faulty.

Yet, if we do our part in obedience to the divine influence, even our faults and frailties may become finer

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excellences. Once Michael Angelo, seeing a distorted piece of marble in the quarry that had been set aside as useless, found in its rough, suggestive angles an inspiration, and presently it was found in his studio, a completed dream in stone of an angel tip-toeing for flight into the empyrean. So will the worst qualities of temperament and heredity become in the hands of our Redeemer an opportunity for perfection, if only our surrender to Him is complete. Our disabilities hold a seed of excellency in them all, and our faults are often but the negative side of nobler virtues. Even those elements in our own nature that give us greatest anxiety and chagrin may by the grace of God become the hall-marks of His renewing power, for His strength is often "perfected" in and through our "weakness."

Our peril is to forget that this shaping power is from God. *No poem ever made itself.* It is an effect, the result of the creative act from above, acting on a material that is obedient to its operation. The man who depends on his own interior resources for the perfecting of his character must therefore fail. Our Maker can alone become our Redeemer; the Creator of the soul only has the resources to become its Renewer.

But when the surrender is complete and man cooperates with God in the process of realising his ideal, what lovely human poems often result! The consecrated lives of history are God's epic of the race. Out of the sad ruins of our nature and its pitiful failures there rise here and there souls so pure and characters so beautiful that they seem alien to the soil and air of this world. Yet are they humanity's most perfect flower. Out of

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the common stuff of our nature they put forth heavenly excellences, they spread abroad a perfume of a sweet and gracious influence, they tell us of things so fair, and qualities so sweet, and virtues so ineffably beautiful, that we are perforce urged to confess "these are the kind of men and women we are all meant to be." Some of them are unknown to fame. They bloom like the violet in out-of-the-way places, or in the common hedgerows of life, yet are they heavenly in their charm, and most potent in their power for good. Such lives as these are good to meet, and it is a privilege beyond price to have one of them in our household. It is their highest quality that, like Maud, they know not of their beauty; for to know it "would half undo it." Unknown to themselves they fill other lives with heavenly influence; sometimes it is only after they are gone that they are recognised for what they were.

" 'Tis only when they spring to Heaven that angels
Reveal themselves to you; they sit all day
Beside you, and lie down at night by you,
Who dream not of their presence, muse or sleep,
And all at once they leave you, and *you know them!* "

XVIII

ON THE USE OF THE IMAGINATION IN RELIGION

“If it were not so, I would have told you.”—JOHN xiv. 2.

I

THE significance of these words is often missed, because they are so often limited in their application to the occasion and the passage in which they occur. I do not believe in finding all sorts of hidden meanings in simple and obvious sayings of our Lord. But it was ever one of His characteristic habits, when speaking to the needs of the moment, to give utterance to some deep and significant law of the soul. What that deep law is must, of course, be ascertained by a careful study of the immediate circumstances. Let us, then, consider them a little closer.

Jesus is here dealing with one of those natural intuitions of the soul in its outlook on the mystery of existence, and especially of the unknown spiritual world into which He, like others, would soon be disappearing. Men in their highest moods have always been impelled to speculate as to what lies beyond the pale of sense and time. In vain do the stern realities of existence, the undeviating laws of matter and force, the stress and pressure of events, tend to stifle this free play of the soul. There are times when no prison can confine it, no chain can fetter its soaring wing. The healthy soul

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lives in visions, in dreams, in glimpses of far away and ineffable glories, and outlines to itself an ideal world which stands forth in the framework of reality as a lovely picture, a glorious "Perhaps." Just as the setting sun weaves out of the mists and fogs of the western sky a cloudy panorama whose charm no painter can transfer to canvas, whose harmonies no musician can translate into sound, so on the dimness and the darkness of our life on earth the soul flashes its ideal of what might be, and of what it loves to believe really is, in that higher order that hangs over us, as the sky overhangs the earth. The cheap sneer of the cynic, the bitter scoff of the pessimist, the discouragement of the sceptic's questioning attitude, cannot for long stifle this intuitive impulse of the soul. It persists in believing that somewhere there is a world fair and sweet as the morning, which is its true home, out of which it is exiled for a time, but which sometime it will claim and enter upon for its very own.

And yet the question will recur, Is there any truth in it all? Have these inner impulses any justification? Is there a heaven so fair, a life beyond so beautiful as we sometimes dare dream about? Is it all mist and moonshine, or is it a foresight of something real? Can we trust the soul in its ecstatic moods, as it sings of blessedness, and glory, and a heaven of many mansions?

The unspeakable value of these words of the Lord Jesus is that they vindicate this native and ineradicable instinct of the soul. It sets *His seal on the sanctified use of the imagination in religion.* It

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proclaims the soul to be a freedman of the universe, with a right to exercise its faculties in picturing to itself an authentic ideal. "In my Father's house are many mansions; *if it were not so I would have told you.*"

As though He had said, "I know you have your dreams of God, of heaven, of a perfect life beyond the tumults of time and the river of death. You think of Him as the Father, the Holy One and the Good, too wise to err, too good to be unkind; whose love is as the salt sea, "washing in pure ablution round earth's human shores," whose mercy is infinite as the sky; whose will for all is eternal life;—you dream of a state where that holy will is ideally done, and where the spirits of just men made perfect serve Him day and night in blessedness. And these dreams are true; "if it were not so *I would have told you.*"

Do we often realise what a large place imagination holds in our religious life, and how great a privilege it is that we thus have our Lord's gracious permission to use it wisely? If His revelation had come to us in set and formal manner, encased in rigid statement and mechanical syllogism, with no penumbra of mystery surrounding it, and no by-ways of speculation and surmise running out from its clear-cut highway of truth, what a different world we should be in! How bald and cold a thing religion would become! There was one maxim which, as used by our forefathers on this question, has always seemed to me shallow and insincere—"that no one should be wise above what is written." *If we were not wise above that which is written, we should never be wise at all.* For how much of the sweetest and

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best elements of religion is rather in what is hinted at than in what is actually revealed? The Gospel is great, indeed, not only in what it states, but also in what it suggests. This wonderful New Testament takes us beyond the prison of sense, the barrack of logic, and sets our feet in a broad place, where mountainous realities dimly loom out in the starlight, and the sunrise touches the eastern hills with gold. In certain matter-of-fact moods, we long to see things more clearly; we ask, "Why are there so many unsettled questions, so many puzzling mysteries, so much cloud and twilight in this revelation?" But in moments of truer insight we realise that God has been true to the soul's needs, not only in that He has given, but also in that He has withheld, so much. And when our dreams of the withheld good startle us by their charm and beauty, when they grow too lovely for belief, when doubt chills our fancy in its soaring flight, we have a right to fall back on our Lord's most gentle but most thrilling words here, "In my Father's House are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you!"

II

1. This leads us to remark, first, that the place left for imagination in religion gives it *an unfading interest*.

I might even say that apart from the play of imagination, there is nothing really interesting to the soul.

It is so with Nature. Why is a monotonous stretch of flat country uninteresting? Because it tells its whole story for itself, leaving nothing for the beholder to

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supply. The eye calls for opening vistas, diminishing perspectives, forest glades, light and shade, mountain-grandeur and mountain-gloom, twilight, sunset and sunrise, the sound of falling waters, breaking waves, pathways of light across far wastes of sea; in these things it revels, because they set free its fancy, and form a lovely framework within which the imagination can paint its pictures at will. No prospect pleases the mind which has not in it some element of mystery, some suggestion of an ineffable Something which we cannot grasp nor define, but which fills us with infinite contentment, because it leaves so much which we must ourselves supply. What is this secret that Nature would tell us, which peeps forth everywhere, and which so often makes us catch our breath, because at last it seems on the point of fully revealing itself? We never quite come to it; but for that very reason, it is the more delightful. If ever that secret were fully revealed, we should turn away from this beautiful world as Alexander turned from his victories in the East, weeping because there is no world left to conquer.

It is so with art. The charm of poetry, of painting, of music lies in what is half concealed as well as half revealed. We are never in love with the writer, or the artist, or the composer, who tells us his whole mind. The secret of style is to stimulate the reader into a partnership of thought with the author, till we scarcely know how much is ours and how much is his. The secret of suggestiveness is the secret of the true preacher, orator, poet. The man who can make me think for myself is the man I want to listen to, not the man who

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does my thinking for me. I demand that my mind should be quickened, my imagination set aglow, or I soon cease to read, or to listen.

This also is true of *human intercourse*. The interchange of thought is only the smallest function of conversation. If our talk fails to stir the deeps of both minds, and set tides and currents of emotion and thought moving far beyond the power of speech to express, let us be silent; it is *mere* talk, a tinkling cymbal. The clash of minds must strike sparks each from the other, and lighten the inner gloom with revealing flashes; then, a word sets free our fancy, and instantly "our heads are bathed with galaxies, and our feet touch the floor of the pit." I am grateful to meet the man who can thus make my soul incandescent, and reveal to me the inner wealth which I cannot realise without his help.

Thus is it in religion. A revelation that told its full story, and that left nothing to imagination, would soon be a spent fire, a cold and deserted altar. If we knew all there is to be known about God, we should ultimately cease to worship Him. And so the Christian faith has come to us in fragments, hints, suggestions, flashes; and not full-orbed. Think of the Biblical revelation of the Godhead! What of the Father? Clouds and darkness are round about Him; His face glows ineffably grand and great, through a mist, and we wonder and bow the head. What of the Son? He is the most mysterious Person of history, who, while He revealed the fulness of the Godhead bodily, left the world with half His message untold, sadly whispering to His loved

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ones, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." What of the Holy Spirit? He is a breath, an influence, a mysterious presence, too faint and far (or too near and intimate?) for language to describe His essence. "O God," cried Augustine in one of his inspired moments, "most hidden, and most manifest!"—therein expressing one of the secrets of the power and fascination of the Godhead for the soul.

This appeal to the imagination is one of the most impressive features of the Christian faith. It is a complex of fact and mystery at every turn. Have you ever considered that nowhere in the Bible do we come across a single definition, and but little explanation of its facts? Facts and dreams—but no theories—this is the characteristic word of our faith. Truths and suggestions—but no creed. Theories and creeds come afterwards; these are the soul's effort to imprison the mystery in words: and as they are man-made they grow old and obsolete almost as soon as they are formulated, while the mystery remains, as ineffable, tantalising, and alluring as ever. Like the tide beating at granite cliffs, ever rising, flowing over, submerging the stubborn rocks, but ever beaten back, leaving them still unconquered, so do men's explanations of spiritual mysteries rise, and break, and fall back again, leaving them still there in their grandeur and glory.

2. But, I remark, in the second place, that in this appeal to imagination working on a background of mystery, there is *a valuable training* as well as an unflinching interest.

When we are asked by the unbeliever, "What is the

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use of bothering ourselves about facts that cannot be explained, and mysteries that remain unfathomed, and dreams which change like the shifting hues of sunset?" —we answer, that thus is the soul quickened and made to grow. Our spiritual faculties in being exercised are strengthened; our emotions are enriched, our will made adequate for life's duties. The soul that ceases to busy itself with the realities that surround it, because it cannot fully or even partially conquer them, and reduce them to categories and syllogism, will soon cease to grow; nay, will shrink and dwindle and die. But the soul that fails in its quest, only to rise again, and is "baffled to fight better," even though it may never in this life come into clear light and understanding of the mysteries of being, will climb into a largeness of vision, and a helpfulness of life which it is the very aim of religion to foster, and will be prepared for those things hereafter "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, but which God hath laid up for those that love Him."

For instance, the Bible is the most puzzling, baffling, perplexing of all books. It is in a sense a compendium of unsolved problems. Its history, its authorship, its documents, its growth, its contents have been the perpetual fascination and despair of the world's greatest scholars and thinkers. No sooner is one theory propounded concerning a book in it, or a doctrine, than it is torn to pieces, and relegated to the dustheap of exploded guesses. And yet is there a book anywhere which so rewards study? You can attack its problems from any point of view you like, and though you entirely

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fail to convince anyone that your explanation is right, you will be a better man, a truer man, than you were before you began to think about it. Somehow, its message will find its way to your heart; somehow, it will subdue, and inspire, and enlighten, and bless you with its light and truth. One might almost say that God crowded these living pages with insoluble problems just to force men to try their strength against them, that so they might come under the influence of the redeeming power of this book. To-day, all previous theories of the Bible seem to be thrown again into the melting-pot, so that we know not where we are. Is that a reason for panic and dismay? Nay, rather is it God's method of bringing the world back to the study of the Book, and so of once more finding life, and growth, and salvation through contact with its glowing and undimmed pages.

3. But, finally, the appeal of religion to the imagination has a still deeper meaning, in the light of these words of Jesus. They set His seal to the delightful truth that the *realities we fail to grasp are better than even our fancy can paint them.*

If we read this statement in the light of the bearing of Jesus on the whole question, we shall have an explanation by one of a strange gap in His teaching. We often ask ourselves, "Why has He told us so little about the future life? Why did He not give us an authentic, authoritative conception of the state of the blessed dead? Why this reserve, this strange silence?" If you will carefully study the Gospels, you will find that the direct statements of our Lord on this subject of Heaven

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and the future may be condensed into half-a-dozen sentences; and his indirect allusions to as many more; and these convey little exact information. Are they, therefore, of little value?

On the other hand I note two characters of this section of our Lord's teaching.

First, the references to the future life are full of suggestion of a state of perfect peace and blessedness, of happiness and service for those who die in the love of God. We are encouraged to give wings to our fancy, and to follow the scanty but frequent hints He gives us freely in our own way.

And, secondly, He gives us the impression afterwards so beautifully developed by St. Paul, that what lies behind the veil is better, grander, holier, diviner than our earthly imagination and faculties can picture. In this word, "If it were not so I would have told you," He, in effect, assures us that nothing can possibly be imagined that falls short of the reality.

Therefore, let us not be afraid to think of Heaven and the Beyond in the happiest, rosiest colours. We have lately fallen on a mood of revulsion from the confident attitude of our forefathers in our thoughts. They took literally those glowing images in the Revelation and spoke of the city of jasper and emerald, of gold and sapphire, of pearls and glass as though it was a kind of photograph of reality. We now recognise that these pictures are essentially Hebrew in their outline and colouring; and we are not drawn to such an idea of Heaven. Shall we then set them aside as of no value to us? So to act is to fall into that sin of

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literalism which we deprecate in past ages. These wonderful and lovely pictures of Heaven, with which the Bible closes, appeal to us now in a different way. They represent in figure the ideal pictured according to the notions and ideals of the first century. We think of these now as essentially *physical* and *materialistic*. Our thoughts would fain picture a very different Elysium, or Paradise, or Heaven. Then, let us do so! All this is here to quicken our imagination rather than to dictate to our intellect. It is poetry, that is, not prose. We find no charm or attractiveness in the thought of a city whose streets are gold and whose walls are jasper, and whose gates are pearl. What would you then? There is a broad liberty within the ample charter of these words for you to picture your own heaven according to the promptings of your highest mood, in the confidence that however different the reality will be from the outlines of your own conception, it will be something greater and grander, not poor and meaner, that shall await you Yonder. Every man is at liberty to paint his own picture of heaven on these conditions—it must represent the highest, the holiest, and the most spiritual ideal of his soul; and—it is the right only of those to do so who are the friends of Him who has gone before them that He may prepare a place for them. Is it an unworthy surmise that, in His heaven for each of us, He will have a due regard for that which will give the soul its ideal environment, and in which we shall find that our earthly dreams, in so far as they are worthy and good, will find their heavenly fulfilment?

XIX

LIFE'S TRANSFIGURATION

"When the ruler of the feast had tasted of the water that was made wine . . . His disciples believed on Him."—JOHN ii. 9—11.

IN the miracle at Cana in Galilee, the Lord Jesus, we are told, once turned water into wine, converting a necessity into a joy; and that this was the "first sign that He wrought," the first manifestation of His glory that He gave, so that His disciples believed on Him. It was not a mere wonder, we are informed, but a sign (see the R. V.), meaning that what He did then was an index-finger pointing to something else, higher and better, that He was prepared to do for all men, and always. And that something is this—that the religion of Jesus is a transforming religion. It is a religion that transfigures fact into poetry, the commonplaces of life into inspirations, the water of bare existence into the wine of spiritual experience. For all who truly believe in Him, life is transfigured; its lower values are loaded with higher meanings; it is wonderfully and permanently enriched; in outlook, in thought, in the possibilities of character, it becomes a new and splendid thing. This enrichment of life by religion is a subject we do not appreciate at its worth. Its effect on life is like the turning of water into wine, at the sudden word of the Lord.

Let us look at some of those aspects of life of which

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this is true; first considering what life is "without Christ," and then what it is with Him.

I

We will begin with the richer and wider outlook which religion gives us of the physical world in which we live.

To the thinking mind, the Universe is a crowded system of facts and forces, closely related and perpetually interworking in rhythmic order and sequence. As such it is intensely interesting, for it is full of meaning and suggestion; so much so, that those who give themselves to the study of Nature find it more absorbing than the most exciting romance. The correlation of living beings with their environment, the perpetually unfolding drama of their development, the profound secret of life's origin, the mystery of mind and matter, the destiny of the physical universe and of the living soul of man—these are entrancing subjects of enquiry and discussion, in which the best minds find an unending and ever renewed delight. But what a difference is there in the depth and range of this meaning according to whether we give room in our minds for religion in our outlook on Nature, or fail to do so!

To the mere secularist, who simply deals with the facts of science, and refuses to take in their spiritual suggestions—to whom the panorama of sea and sky only comprises so many material objects arranged by no ordering hand, and instinct with no all-commanding mind—how bald and cold and bare the world must be! The "blowing clover and the falling rain" have nothing

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to say to him of the Divine Providence and love. "A primrose by the river's brim, a yellow primrose is to him," and nothing more. The mystery out of which all things proceed is a deep, unfathomable darkness, shot through with no gleam of light. It is as though the earth were deprived of her over-arching environing sky.

But when our minds are transformed by the touch of the truth of Christ, how altered is our outlook on the whole world of Nature and man! It is instantly changed from a bare inventory of facts into a treasury of higher values. The daisy at our feet, the summer cloud in the sky, the procession of the seasons, the song of birds, the laughter of little children, are all suddenly impregnated with a significance which fills the heart with joy and love. "The universe is not a charnel house and a grave, but God-like, and my Father's!" We are in our Father's House, who has hung the walls with pictures for *us* to see, and carpeted the floor with grass beautified with flower-patterns for *us* to walk on, and loaded the table of life with dainties for *us* to eat. Sleep becomes His benediction on the day's work, and morning the opening of another door into the wonder world of experience. Life is a drama in which He is the unseen but central figure, and we are His comrades in working out the great climax of the story. This is the change that Christ works in life for those that love Him.

Not long ago, I was watching one of the glorious sunsets of the season. The sun was setting in a blaze of glory in a crimson sky, and over a sea of sapphire

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and emerald, spangled with glittering diamonds. I tried hard to think of this wonderful pageant as it must appear to a man who had no faith in God. I tried to think of the painted sea and sky as an accidental collocation of atoms, so related to my eye that these effects followed by a blind mechanical law, yet revealing nothing but the possibilities of material forms and colours. It was beautiful even so. But when I let my heart join in the interpretation of the scene spread before my eye, what an uplift, what an inspiration these bare facts bore on their airy wings! I saw the great Artist at work, painting a picture different for every eye that saw it according to its gift of vision, but for everybody who cared to recognise it, a revelation of His beautiful mind and loving heart—a picture endless in its suggestions, which was also a parable of higher and holier things, “which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard.” And all this difference has been wrought for all who are worthy, by Him who turned water into wine at Cana in Galilee. He is the Prophet of Nature as well as the Shepherd of the soul, and has given us the key to her interpretation by linking the Fatherhood of God with the lily of the field, and the bird of the air, and the glimmer of summer seas in the sunset.

II

But let us come nearer home to our own life and experience, and consider the transformation of the natural affections which is wrought by Jesus for His people.

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The family, not the individual, is the unit of human life. Nature has bound us in the home by organic ties, and by instinctive attachments. These are the same all the world over, and find their counterpart in the family life of other creatures, rising to their highest development in human beings. Now there is great joy and pleasure in the natural relations of the family, and in the relations of friendship and social life in the wider family of the race. But even so, how much more there is in these natural relationships when viewed as the earthly counterpart of the relation we hold as spiritual beings to our Creator! What dignity is bestowed on earthly fatherhood and motherhood by the transforming word whispered for all of us in the first phrase in the Lord's prayer—"Our Father, who art in heaven"! It brands the selfishness, and the disagreements, and the bickerings, which disfigure our homes as unworthy elements intruding into an ideal relationship. It puts its seal on the service, and the self-annihilation, and the mutual love, which are the normal principles of the home. It creates an atmosphere of romance and beauty round life from the cradle to the tomb. It gives the promise of the eternal continuance of all these natural ties, when fulfilled happily and worthily in the fear of God. To those who love Christ the home is not only the beginning of life's career but the very centre of life's joy; and the best name we have for Heaven is that it is our eternal home. The home that is without Christ as compared to the home in which His love is the atmosphere, and the fountain of its inspiration is "as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine."

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III

Let us come nearer home still to our inner life, and consider how Christ transforms the meaning of its two severest laws—the law of *duty*, and the law of *suffering*.

Duty, apart from Him, is a dry and stony word, linking itself with all that is difficult in life. It is the symbol of the disquietude of the soul in thinking of the conflict between the upward and downward forces of life, of its moral tasks, of its unattainable ideas. "It is my duty," we say, with a sigh of despair, and—if we confess all—with an impulse of revolt. The shining law of right gleams with a lustre hard as steel and cold as starlight, to the man who is merely duty-driven, who acknowledges no higher fact than the feeling "I ought!"

Now consider the wonderful change this word undergoes under the transforming touch of Christ. He awakens first of all our love to Himself—and then He takes the hard behests of right, the cold commands of duty, the inevitable and even impossible *dicta* of the moral law, and says "Do these—for My sake!" Instantly the hard becomes easy, and the impossible a labour of love; we are filled with the power of an endless life. We know how a supreme human affection makes us capable of wonderful efforts and sacrifices. The lover will do great things for his loved one; the patriot will fight to the death for his country; one friend will peradventure give his life for another; the mother will find poetry and joy in all the sacrifices she has to make for her sick or infirm child. But these human affections act only within

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restricted channels; they are partial, incomplete, often whimsical in their action. In order that the whole round of duty may be transformed into a glad service, you need a love that covers the whole of life and says, "All this belongs to me and I must have it all." And that is what Jesus does for the soul that loves Him. He identifies Himself with each single duty that life contains, and says, "Do it—for My sake." He co-ordinates every great and every little responsibility into a single law, whispering "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me!" Every hard task loses its hardship when it is inspired by a great love like this; the earthly water becomes purest wine of heaven, at the word of its Lord.

Does this love of Christ dwell in our hearts richly, as it ought to do? In the measure that it does, we shall find life transformed, beautified, radiant in all its length and breadth. The granite rock bathed in sunset loses its forbidding outlines, and glows like a dream; and the hardest duty becomes an altar on which we gladly offer our best, when the transfiguring light of the love of Christ laps it with its tenderness, and fires it with its splendour.

And that other hard word—*suffering*, from which we turn as from a pointed spear hovering in an enemy's hand; does not the love of Christ transfigure it into a shepherd's crook, by which He gently leads His own over life's rough places? None of us love to suffer; it is something which we instinctively avoid as an inherent evil; our heart and our soul cry out against it. Yet consider what this sharp, piercing word becomes in the

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vocabulary of the Cross of One who Himself was made "perfect through suffering": so does this sword of agony become God's graving-tool, with which He cuts the finest lines of character in those who give themselves into His hands! "For even Christ pleased not Himself," *i.e.*, He willingly accepted suffering, recognising that here was the refining touch whereby He was moulded into the final lines of beauty. But more than this. Jesus transformed suffering into the saving power of grace. "Without shedding of blood"—*i.e.*, without the uttermost agony of suffering—"there is no remission of sin." "Who once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit." Was ever such divine chemistry as this—by which the rudest buffetings of pain and persecution were transfigured into triumph, and the black stream of the world's hate turned against itself, so as to run clear and sweet in the goblet of the Lord's Supper? If the sufferings of Christ could become a river of redemption for the world, then there is no pang that is not capable of becoming a song, there is no black midnight of despair that cannot be transformed into a morning of delight.

IV

"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

The world's pleasures, the joys of sense, are acutest when first tasted in the bloom of their freshness, and they slowly fade into commonplaces as the appetite is palled

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by satisfaction. The best wine of earth becomes as insipid as water when men have well drunken. Youth thinks the wine-cup of life is exhaustless, and that it will taste as sweet to the end as at the beginning; but middle age grows weary of pleasure, and to the old the cup of sensual joy is empty or bitter. But there is One who has the secret of giving the best wine last. Those who give themselves into the hands of Jesus Christ will find in that giving the secret of perpetual youth and gladness. Almost all worldly men become cynics before the end; life's illusions, as they are called, are pricked like a bubble, and those things for which they toiled and wore themselves out—the indulgences and pleasures and ambitions of life—become as apples of Sodom, as dust and ashes in their mouth. They lose faith in men, they lose faith in goodness, and they have no horizon beyond the dark valley. The worldly life is a closing vista. But to the truly Christian man life is an opening perspective. His feet are on the rock, which no storm can shake. His treasure is in heaven, where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and where thieves never break through nor steal. His hope is undimmed to the end, for he hopes in God. He looks forward to a life of peace and service in a world beyond the grave, in the presence of Him where is "fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

I will venture to illustrate this great law of spiritual transformation from the life of a noble Christian preacher who has left us recently, and from whose writings thousands have received deep and lasting inspiration—Dr. George Matheson. He was a man

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highly and richly endowed, and in his youth he seemed destined to become one of the leading minds of his generation. Suddenly, in the course of a brilliant student-career, he was smitten with a great physical calamity, and became totally blind. From an earthly point of view his career seemed over. But out of the darkness that fell on his physical eyes, light broke on his soul, and, sustained by the high inspiration of his faith, he turned his night into a day that shone for others as well as himself. By exercising an unconquerable will, and by a sweetness of a spirit which no sorrow could embitter, he triumphed over his affliction, and transformed what otherwise might have been a savour of death unto death into a savour of life unto life. Hampered as he was, he continued his studies, and preached and wrote to the end with ardour and inexhaustible power. When resigning his pastorate at Edinburgh, he described himself to his people as one "barred by every gate of fortune, yet refusing to give in; overtaken by the night, but confident of the morning." "My sermons," he said, "have flown over your heads like the bird of paradise, but my life has been level with yours, an obstructed life, a circumscribed life, but a life of boundless sanguineness, a life of quenchless hopefulness, a life that has beaten persistently against the call of circumstance, and which at the time of abandoned work has said, not Good night, but Good morning!"

The quintessence of this life of joy found in depths of suffering, of victory won out of the very jaws of crushing defeat, has found expression in a hymn written

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by him in a moment of depression which he transfigured into a poem of delight, which thousands of congregations will sing for their comfort through coming generations, and which expresses as no prose words could ever do the triumph of a soul that has been redeemed and transfigured by the love of Christ. I will venture to close with a commentary of one of his personal friends on this beautiful hymn :—

“The unceasing appeal which the love of God makes to the soul, the truth that God loved us into being, that as we owe our life to Him, so it is only in love of Him that we find rest, only in service of Him that our life attains fulness—these are the thoughts with which the singer starts on his flight.

“O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.”

“That whatever light we have is but a spark from the central fire, that the Divine Light ever shines and never fades, that the unsteady little lights by which we grope may sometimes dim its dawning glory, that by quenching them so as to let the Eternal Light shine, it *does* shine more and more unto the perfect day, that in God’s light we see light—are some of the ideas to which the poet next gives expression.

“O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.”

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“ Then the poet, turning his eye inwards, is conscious of a mysterious joy mingling with and transfiguring his grief, a joy which, however absorbed he is in his sorrow, will force itself upon him again and again ; he sees a shimmer of meaning and mercy in the darkness of his lot, he beholds a bow in the cloud, giving assurance that the destroying flood will cease.

' O Joy that seeketh me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee ;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.'

“ The poet is convinced that it is so. As in the light that ‘ followeth all his way ’ he sees his cross to be his crown, he must not impatiently ask deliverance from the burden, he entreats power to make in the spirit of trust the sacrifice to which God plainly calls him.

' I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.' ”

XX

AN IDYLL OF THE SPRING

“My beloved spake . . . Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.”—CANT. ii. 10—13.

I

IT is ever needful to bear in mind the reality and the limitations of what is somewhat loosely called the Gospel of Nature. It is a real gospel, for there is a true religious message in the beautiful world in which we live. And while her message is not a complete one, since it leaves us in doubt at times even of the personality of her Maker, the natural world is a portico into the temple of a true and heartfelt worship for all who enter with sympathy into her mystery, her life, and her loveliness. There are probably times in the life of even the most callous and materialistic when some natural sight or sound, some combination of sunset colours, some bird-song or sound of falling waters, suddenly surprises them into a mood, however evanescent, in which they feel themselves in the presence of the holy mystery that lies behind all things, and ever waits patiently for recognition.

It is needful that this aspect of the universe should have its due place in our regard. Physical science has done great things for us, whereof we are glad; but there are two impressions it is instrumental in creating which are not good. In the first place, it has been

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over-engaged with the surface facts of matter and life, so that it has minimised the mystic underlying reality which lies behind all phenomena, and in the next place it has over-emphasised the struggle of life, and paid too great an attention to the facts of suffering and death. And so, while we must always thank science for having given us a new view of the orderliness, the ingenuity, and the wonderful laws of development that govern the natural world, we must not permit it to hide the mystery which lies behind all things, nor must we allow it to give the lie to the testimony of every living creature that life is sweet, and that the joys of existence incalculably outweigh its sorrows and its pains, except when sin disturbs and defeats the beneficent divine purpose, which apart from it everywhere moves towards its predestined end.

Every great religion, and Christianity pre-eminently, proclaims the mystical mission of Nature. The ethnic sacred books are full of beautiful testimony to the beauty and glory of the world. Even the oldest of all—the Egyptian Book of the Dead—glows with this feeling, and the latest—the Koran—likewise chants the praises of God as His image is seen in sky and earth, flower and flood. The Bible is full of Nature-worship: *i.e.*, not the worship of Nature, but worship *by* and *through* Nature. The Psalms are lyrical with this sentiment; there are many passages of glorious spiritual music in the Prophets; and in the parables and illustrations of Jesus, we can see the highest use of natural imagery as the vehicle of spiritual truths. God reveals Himself, even while He hides Himself,

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in the world of sense. And if so, is it not our duty as well as our privilege as Christians to cultivate for ourselves this faculty of seeing Him in the work of His hands, and tracing His activity, whose footsteps are in the sea, and who rides on the wings of the storm?

Ruskin puts the case with his usual force and beauty. "If we now take," he writes in the 17th chapter of the third volume of "Modern Painters," which treats of the *moral of landscape*, "if we now take final and full view of the matter, we shall find that the love of Nature, wherever it has existed, has been a faithful and sacred element of human feeling, *i.e.*, supposing all circumstances otherwise the same with respect to two individuals, the one who loves Nature most will be always found to have more *faith in God* than the other. It is intensely difficult, owing to the confusing and counter influences which always mingle in the data of the problem, to make this abstraction fairly; but so far as we can do it, so far, I boldly assert, the result is constantly the same: the Nature-worship will be found to bring with it such a sense of the presence and power of the Great Spirit as no mere reasoning can either induce or controvert; and where that Nature-worship is innocently pursued—*i.e.*, with due respect to other claims on time, feeling, and exertion, and associated with the higher principles of religion—it becomes the channel of certain sacred truths which by no other means can be conveyed." And later on he proceeds thus:—"Instead of supposing the love of Nature necessarily connected with the faithlessness of the age, I believe it is

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connected properly with the benevolence and liberty of the age; that it is precisely the most healthy element which distinctively belongs to us; and that out of it, cultivated no longer in levity and ignorance, but in earnestness and as a duty, results will spring of an importance at present inconceivable; and lights arise which, for the first time in man's history, will reveal to him the true nature of his life, the true field for his energies, and the true relations between him and his Maker."

II

If this be so—and who can doubt it?—can there be a more sacred or hallowed time for the worshipful soul than the glorious blossoming time of the year, when every living thing awakens to a new sense of vitality, and the whole earth wakes from her winter sleep? I cannot, in my heart, understand how anyone can be irreligious at any time, but least of all at the time when Nature is about to be decked as for a festival of joy and praise to her wonderful Creator and Lord.

Let me suggest a few stanzas—in prose—of the Idyll of the Spring—that living poem which God is now weaving in the rhythm and pulsation of life throughout the wide domains of Nature.

1. First consider *the mystery of life* and its happenings.

Mystery? Yes, even in these days of advanced biology, we must speak of the profound mystery of life. They tell us now, with growing confidence, these wise scientists, that they have solved the question, whether life can be spontaneously generated, in the

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affirmative. I express no opinion on this very technical question, but I may boldly affirm this, that were all the laboratories of this world to teem suddenly with strange new forms of life, the underlying mystery would be in no way touched. Whether all life comes from life, or life makes fresh starts on its own account here and there and yonder, its secret origin, its roots, must still be in the Unseen; and the only Author of life would still be the Ever-living One, from whom all things proceed, and in whom they live and move and have their being. Every "flower in the crannied wall"; every lamb gambolling in the meadow; every fledgling tumbling, eager and adventurous, out of its nest; every midge floating in the air—each according to its own hidden law, and after its kind—would proclaim a wisdom and a power and a beauty divine. How life begins; how it propagates itself, so as to unfold from the tiny cell the full-grown, complicated, balanced form; how it maintains itself, by nourishment, waste and repair, till its appointed career is run, and the materials it has used for its fairy-palace fall to pieces and pass and die, and are used up again for other forms—what a wonderful, amazing, divinely-ordered drama is here! Who shall account for it, who explain it? Surely the secret is in the hands of God; and He who originates it and maintains it can alone explain it. All we can do is to wonder at it in other creatures, and enjoy and care for it in ourselves—ay, wonder, and "bow the head"!

2. In a few weeks—as I write—this wonderful procession of life will be again in full flood; and then a

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second stanza in the Idyll of Spring will be weaving its lines of beauty before us—the *stanza of timeliness*.

Timeliness! “Thou hast made everything beautiful *in its time!*” There is order, not only in the co-ordinations of Nature, but in her sequences. Not all at once does the picture flash on us, but like an unfolding drama. I am no more a naturalist than I am a biologist, and I cannot trace the technical steps of the beautiful story, nor is it needful for my purpose. How one bird after another, having wandered long and far in distant climes, finds its way back to the old hedgerow or copse, where it built its nest last year, or where it was fledged, who can tell? Yet “the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming” (Jer. viii. 7); the snowdrop peeps up through the frost and snow, and her sister flowers come in fit order one after another, week by week, and month by month, till the Michaelmas daisy and dahlia and chrysanthemum close the magic circle on the threshold of winter; each tree year by year puts forth her leaves in her season; living creatures pair and produce their young at the punctual call of their divinely-appointed instincts. Is it not wonderful, when we remember that this has happened from the earliest dawn of life on our planet, that everything has its place and time and manner of appearing, and that birth, life and death follow their hidden but balanced law? And shall we deny that there is purpose and wisdom and beneficence behind this beautiful law of timeliness? Nothing is born till the environment is ready for it, till its food is waiting for it, till its

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opportunity of running its full course of enjoyment and experience has arrived. Fit and fair and timely moves the drama from start to finish, and every year the world is a stage on which life repeats its tragedies and comedies without a break.

Shall all Nature fall into line with the divine purpose, and punctually perform her functions, and we fail to do so? The prophet who says, "The stork . . . knoweth her appointed time, . . ." adds, "But my people know not the judgment of the Lord." Men and women alone violate their instincts, refuse to fulfil their functions, and put time itself out of joint by their disobedience! The earth must wait her season to put forth her buds, the snows of December cannot bring forth the flowers of June. But the "winter" of the soul's "discontent" may at any moment turn into the soul's blossoming time; any day may see its quickening into life everlasting. The greatest of miracles is the miracle of regeneration.

3. Mystery, order, timeliness, these are all strings on which spring strikes sweet music, full of haunting over- and under-tones. But there is more than all this in the spring-song.

It is the hour of *promise and expectancy*. The earth is on tiptoe, her eyes are towards the future. The day is lengthening, the sun is wheeling higher and higher in the heavens, the clouds are full of new lights and shadows, everything seems to be looking over something else's shoulder, eager as for some great apocalypse. Now and then there are hours which are an earnest of the weeks and months to come—of sunshine, and sweetness, and fragrance; of prophetic blossoms which

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spring up behind the footsteps of God's angel of spring. And we know from long experience that this "earnest of our inheritance," which we enjoy now in scraps and morsels, is not a lying dream; it is a promise that will be fulfilled to the uttermost; "while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." There will be lean years and fat years; but all years will have some fulfilment, and the magic chain of life shall never be broken "till all be fulfilled."

God's faithfulness is a theme we do not often dwell on in these days. Our fathers were never tired of dwelling upon it, for their soul's good. The great Creator does not mock His creatures with eager desires that are destined never to be satisfied. For every instinct there is satisfaction somewhere; for every form of hunger there is food; for every high aspiration, fulfilment—if we will. He who gives every creature its food in due season will not starve the soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness. There is light for the eye, music for the ear, love for the heart, heaven for the holy and the good. Have we many spiritual instincts that do not here find their satisfactions? Do we dream of a world too fair for reality? Are there visions that shall never take shape outside the soul that sees them? Nay; "if it were not so, I would have told you." "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." Here and now is but the faint promise, the early spring of the soul; but there is a summer yonder, which has its witness and proof in every longing heart. This world is too narrow for the

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realisation of the divine nature given to us; the soul needs a larger stage, a warmer and brighter environment, for its full growth; and not till we are transplanted to a better land shall we put forth all our powers, and realise all our possibilities. "Behind the veil, behind the veil!"

III

And how are these possibilities to be fulfilled? How shall this heavenly summer be realised in and for the soul? Once more learn the lesson of the spring.

The earth awakens from winter and its cold, and darkness, and fogs—how? By the simple process of turning her bosom sunward. In the cold dark days, our northern hemisphere leans away from the sun; then the earth swings round, and presently we bask in his full warm radiance. And then? O then, there is no hedgerow without its dog-roses, or violets; no bush without its songster; no meadow without its carpet of grass and flowers; no cornfield without its waving crop of growing grain. The earth cannot put forth her buds and leaves without the help of the sky. *But the sky is always there, and always ready*, waiting for the hour when the earth shall wheel towards it in her orbit.

Will you not learn the parable? Are you, dear soul, in the winter of your discontent? Is your life barren, and cold, and dark, and your soul dried up within you? Do you feel a deep sense of helplessness and misery, of loneliness and fruitlessness? And is it not because you have turned your heart away from God? Is it not because you have wandered, like a star from her orbit,

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away from the source of life and love? Is it not because you have tried to be sufficient unto yourself, forgetting that as the earth is made for the sky, so your soul is made for God? And do you want to know the remedy? Believe me, it is not in *trying to be better*; in forcing yourself to do this and be that. As well might the earth in winter try to force the blossoms out of her stony heart, and cause the ice to melt by sheer inward effort. That would be vain. She seems to know better, this dear old mother-earth of ours! So she bides her time; and at last she turns slowly sunward. Then the result follows as the day the night, and spring comes stealthily flying from the land of perpetual summer in the far south, bringing ten thousand birds in her train, and spreading the zone of her verdure right up to the rugged ridges of the Pole!

And none of us can become good and rich and happy of soul in any other way. Only by turning our hearts Godward and Christward; by opening every chink and cranny of the soul to the divine light and love and grace. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts!" What we cannot do, He, the Life-giver, the Quickener, the Lord of love, will do for us. Nay, it is not by trying that we shall become good and happy, but by *receiving*. What we need is life, and more life, and ever more life. And the Life-giver is near us, pouring down His mighty stores of grace, and light, and love, on those ready to receive them.

Reader, are you fulfilling this law? Are you living in the light of God's countenance? Do you pray, and

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pray, and pray for what God alone can give you? Shall not God remember His elect, and bless His heritage, and do for us far more than we can ask or conceive? He can and He will. Let us put His promise to the test, and as surely as He is God, so surely He will not fail us or disappoint us in our hour of need, be it little or great!

XXI

ON WEATHER IN RELIGION

“That we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind.”—EPHES. iv. 14.

EVERY newspaper now has its weather-chart, in which we have a record of yesterday's and a forecast of to-day's weather. The record is of course always right, and the forecast, though not absolutely certain, is growing more and more reliable. The proverbial uncertainty of the weather is gradually giving way to the insight and method of science. However impossible it may be to control the weather, we are gradually becoming able to do the next best thing—to prophesy what it is going to be. Perhaps in time we shall go further, and make our own weather as we make our own gas and electricity. Whether we shall be able to improve on what Nature gives us is another matter.

Now there is such a thing as weather in religion as there is in Nature. And first, let me define clearly what I mean.

The world's weather in the broader sense falls into three broad classifications. There is first *climate*, which means the average weather of any particular country or locality. There are tropical climates, full of steady sunshine and glowing heat, where Nature

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is fruitful and abundant, and spreads her dainties at man's feet with lavish prodigality; and there are Arctic climates, where snow and ice, glacier and iceberg, largely bind the year in iron bands, and spring and summer are passing episodes of an age-long winter. Between these extremes we have temperate climates, in which the extremes of heat and cold are modified, but which subdivide into moist and dry, sunny or foggy, and what not. Secondly, there is *season*, in which there is a more or less steady alternation of heat and cold, rain and shine, growth and decay, from year to year. And thirdly, there is *weather* proper, which means the changes that take place from day to day in the temperature of the air, and the amount of cloud, clear sky, mist and rain that come and go.

Now in the inner conditions of our life there is a striking analogy to these physical phenomena. We all have our spiritual *climate*, our religious *seasons*, our daily *weather*, in our religious lives. Corresponding to *climate* is *temperament*, the more or less steady bearing or attitude of the soul to the great realities of faith; corresponding to *seasons*, there are *periods of promise, fulfilment and decay* in our religious experience; corresponding to *weather*, there are our *moods* or alternations of faith and doubt, clear vision or darkness, joy or sadness, coming and going from day to day and from week to week.

I

Just as every country or district has its settled or average climate, so every man and woman has his or her

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temperament, which is the settled or average mood of our inner life. We are all keyed to a different note, we live on a different level, we enjoy different grades and intensities of religious experience; in a word, we live each of us in a world of our own, coloured with our own atmosphere, and governed by conditions peculiar to each individual soul. What it is that makes temperament, we do not exactly know; but psychologists are agreed that its roots lie largely, if not entirely, in our physical systems. I suppose it acts somewhat as follows. If we are looking through a coloured window, whose panes are tinted, let us say, a bright gold, we can easily transfer the tint of the glass to the landscape itself, and imagine that we are looking at a scene bathed in golden sunshine. Deepen the tint somewhat, and the same scene will look a rather bilious yellow. Now transfer the colour to the seeing mind, and give each spectator a different tint of his own, and you have something like what we have in real life. We all have our prevailing atmosphere through which we tend to look at things. One man is an optimist, and to him all things are tinted in rose-colour; another is a pessimist, and the same facts seem to him clothed in drab—life is a monotone. The humorist walks along a pathway fringed with grotesque growths; the very mist and rain distil curious fancies; even the shadows have their smile. The man of strenuous purpose, on the other hand, who is set on the accomplishment of some great end, sees nothing funny, nothing frivolous, anywhere; the world is so much mechanism for him to use that his cherished purpose may be fulfilled. So we meet and pass in this motley

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procession of life—the buffoon and the philosopher, the gay and the sad, the light and the heavy-hearted. “To the pure all things are pure; but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure.” From every mind there emanates an atmosphere of its own, through which it looks at all things, and with which it colours everything.

“Through which it looks at all things”—even things divine and eternal. For even the abiding realities of the Spirit do not come to us all with the same force, do not possess the same quality. It is easier for one man to believe in God, and in His love, and in His goodness, than for another. There is a sceptical bent or bias, as there is a trustful bent or bias. John is all for love, Thomas is all for reasoning his way, Peter is all for doing things. We all have our climate in religion.

Two things follow: (1) “Let us not judge each other any more.” If it is easy for you to believe, remember that your brother does not find it easy. If you are full of doubts and difficulties which intrude even into your worship and your prayers, do not scoff at the simple faith of your fellow-worshipper, who lives in daily contact with the unseen, and who is as honest in his faith as you are in your scepticism. And remember that God knows us all, and can measure our difficulties, and can make allowance for the personal equation in our religion. He does not expect us all to be dreamers of dreams and seers of visions, but He takes us with all our advantages and disabilities of temperament, and judges us according to perfect truth and infinite love. If you are prone

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to quarrel with the temperament He has given you, remember that every other temperament has its disabilities and temptations, and that in His eye the melancholic, pessimistic man is as precious as the optimist and the enthusiast; indeed, that He has a work for the one as well as for the other, and a place for both to fill in this parti-coloured universe, where clouds and darkness have their place as well as sunshine and clear day.

(2) The second aspect of temperament to be borne in mind is this—remember that the realities of faith are the same for all, and that we must therefore do all in our power to correct our faults of temperament, lest we do injustice to God as well as man. Clear your windows of mist, ice-pictures, dust or colour, or whatever interferes with a clear, steady vision of things as they are. Or, if you cannot do that, then make all needful discount for the “personal equation,” as it is called. Say to yourself, “I know that I look at things from a prejudiced point of view. Life is not so sad as I tend to think, or not so rosy. I must allow for any ‘defect of will and taint of blood’ in myself, and correct my partial judgments of the world of men, of God Himself, by the saner, calmer, steadier views of others.” If we all did this, we should be happier and better men and women; our faith would be deeper, our judgment would be safer, our life would be more helpful to others, and theirs to us.

II

And now a word about the second kind of weather, what we colloquially call weather—that which changes

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day by day. If *climate* corresponds to temperament, and *season* to the stages of life's growth, *weather* in this sense corresponds to *mood*. What I mean by this is that as there are certain settled elements of experience and outlook dependent on the disposition or nature we have inherited, there are also certain changes in our spiritual temper, in the tone and quality of our religious feelings that come and go from day to day.

In our changeable atmosphere, we are often told by foreigners we have no such thing as climate; it is all weather, a constantly changing procession of clouds and sunshine, heat and cold, storm and calm. Similarly, there is in most of us an element of perpetual uncertainty and changefulness in our experience of the great spiritual realities. Some of us indeed are at the mercy of the whim of the moment. According to our state of health, our circumstances, our company, our habits of prayer or the neglect of prayer, we pass into and out of the mood of faith. To-day we are firm believers; to-morrow we are secret or open sceptics. In all of us there is this tidal element, this ebb and flow of spiritual intensity, this inconstant light and shade which brightens or darkens our religion.

In a sense this is an attribute of our mortality; it is a part of human nature. Our very pulse and heart-beat are more or less inconstant; and as with the body so with the soul. Good men as well as bad men are afflicted with this tendency to inconstancy in their higher life. I cannot help feeling that our Lord Jesus Christ was not exempt from these alternations of feeling. Even His

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sinless soul was not always in the light. He spoke of hours of exaltation and of gloom that swept over the inner peace of His life. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. There is, therefore, nothing sinful in the fact that we cannot always live in the sunshine of God's full presence; that sometimes spiritual realities seem farther off than at others. The test is not whether these moods come and go: for come and go they will; but how we act under their discipline. How do we deal with our moods? Do we give way to them, or do we endeavour to control them? When the sky is overcast, do we doubt the existence of the sun? Nay; we know he is shining as brightly as ever behind the clouds and the storm, and so we wait confidently for his reappearing. So when we lose sight of the face of God under the stress of these low moods, shall we doubt His being or His goodness? He is ever the same, perfect in holiness and love; in Him is no change, neither any shadow cast by turning. So let us be patient, and wait for the shining of His face.

“ Fool ! all that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall :
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure ;
What entered into thee
That was, is, and shall be :
Time's wheel runs back and stops ; Potter and clay endure.”

Above all, let us not neglect our duty because the sky is overcast for the time. God can for a while do without our vision of Him, but He cannot do without our service; and His faithful ones are true to Him in the midnight

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of sorrow, and the darkness of despair, as well as in the hours of intense brightness and sunshine.

Matthew Arnold deals finely with this problem—

“ We cannot kindle when we will
The fire that in the soul resides ;
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery the soul abides.
But tasks in hours of insight willed
May be through hours of gloom fulfilled ! ”

III

We now come to the third element—*season in religion*.

By this I mean that we tend to form views in spiritual matters which differ from time to time according to our stage of growth, our age, and our special experiences.

There is the season of childhood to which Paul refers in this passage, when the mind is tossed to and fro, as by contrary or fitful winds. In this unformed period, we believe what we are told ; we take the stamp of stronger and older minds as they impress their influence upon us ; we are sensitive as clay to impression ; we freely and rapidly take a good or bad influence into our lives. There is an advantage as well as a disadvantage in this incapacity to stand alone. For this is pre-eminently the opportunity of the parent and the teacher to give young souls their bent. Our children give us our chance to impress our better selves on the rising generation.

Then there is the season of youth, when stormy winds blow, and gusty passions rise, alternating with spells of calm weather and clear hopeful outlooks over the wide

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spaces of the future. Older people, who have forgotten their youth, often imagine that young people are always bright and hopeful, and that enthusiasm for high things is easy to them. Alas! if I remember anything of my own youth I will say that, of all the years of my life, those between eighteen and twenty-four or twenty-five were the hardest and severest in my experience; and I believe it to be the experience of most men and women. This is the season of March winds and April showers, of tremendous unsettlements, of despair and joy, of hours of desolation and anon of inspiration passing in swift and perpetual change. What a turmoil of uncertainty many a soul passes through during those trying years, when mind and heart suddenly awake from the happy dream of childhood, and the soul is bombarded on all hands with influences good and bad, and blown upon by airs from heaven and blasts from hell, till it knows not where to turn for rest! Only long afterwards were we able to see that all this disturbance was but a sign of growth and expansion; and that this, the time of hardest trial was also the time when God was leading us, by a way that we knew not, to Himself. Those who have sons and daughters who are passing through this turbulent period should be kind and patient with them. Let them remember if they can their own hot youth, and use their influence gently but firmly, to lead them into the paths of peace. And let those who are passing through this time, see to their own selves. Let them curb that unruly will, conquer those uprising passions, lead captive into the captivity of Christ those fierce yearnings for pleasure and self-indulgence, lest their

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young life be wrecked in its promise, and made desolate before its prime. There is a good time coming for them if they control and master themselves now ; and a time of horror and shame if they do not.

Next, there is the *summer* season of life, when character settles down within its final lines, and the turbulence of youth gives way to the steady purpose and concentration of middle age. Now is the time for fulfilling the promise, and realising the ideals of youth. Many of life's blossoms have now faded, and its enthusiasms have died down a little. But instead there is the strengthening will, the growing purpose, the accumulating treasure of life. The summer is the time for expansion, for fulfilment, for strenuous effort in all good things. Those who have reached this settled stage in their career should see to it that they miss no chance, that they neglect no duty, that they fill the flying days with energy and zeal, and good works. Let there be no flagging of interest in the things that matter most. Let there be no slackening of energy in the service of the Most High. Let there be no slumbering in the soul's high quest. Let them work "the works of Him that sent them while it is day ; for the night cometh, when no man can work !"

And lastly there is the season of old age,—the *autumn* and winter of life. Is this the sad time which it is often represented to be ? Only to him who has missed life's good things so far ; only to him whose treasure is all of earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal ; only to him who is bound to confess at last, "the summer is ended, and the harvest is passed : and I am not saved." Autumn is

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the season of "mists and mellow fruitfulness." It is the time—for the good man at least—of long happy evenings, in which memory lights her lamp after the sun has gone down, and through the shadows the eternal stars look down in peace on the garnered fields and the resting hedgerows of life. Shakespeare has given us an immortal picture of a noble old age in "As You Like It,"—where Adam says to Orlando :—

"Though I look old, yet am I strong and lusty,
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility ;
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty but kindly."

And Browning has given us a picture, which is, if possible, still more strong and true in "*Rabbi Ben Ezra*" :—

"Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made ;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith 'A whole I planned ;
Youth shows but half ; trust God ; see all, nor be afraid.'

* * * *

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who moulded men,
And since, not even while the whirl was worst ;
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife
Bound dizzily—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst :

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So take and use Thy work !
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim !
My times be in Thy hand,
Perfect the cup as planned !
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same !”

We have been dealing in this study of weather in religion, with the instabilities of our subjective spiritual experience, and have left out of sight the outward vicissitudes of circumstance and lot which provide another element of changefulness in human life. This is a large subject, and would require a separate treatment. In closing our sketch, let me remind the reader of the complementary truth of our religion—the unchangeableness and faithfulness of God, in whom is “no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning.” It is our comfort that while we and all our fellowmen belong to the world of change, He is always the same, “ever faithful, ever sure.” When we are discouraged by the sense of our own instability, and that of other men, it is good to think of One to whom we can ever go, on whom we can always lean, sure that He is immutable in His truth, tenderness, and sympathy. And when we lose faith in our own resources, and are disappointed by the fickleness of those around us, it is good to cast ourselves on the unfailing friendship of Christ, and to realise that He too is the “same yesterday, today, and for ever.” Let us each, when hard pressed by the sense of our mortality, rest our weary spirits on His everlasting love, and find heart’s ease in the prayer—

“O Thou that changest not,
Abide with me !”

XXII

GRACE

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”—
REV. xxii. 21.

THE Bible represents God as beginning with the creation of the material world, and ending with the bestowal of His favour and blessing on saved and perfected humanity. At one end of the line of evolution—matter; at the other extreme—grace of life. A long journey to travel; God alone could have completed it. The Bible is the record of the process by which formless matter, energised and vitalised, became the organism of the glorified soul, filled with all the fulness of Christ. And we must confess that the Book which begins with chaos and ends with the vision of the New Jerusalem “coming down from God out of Heaven,” is, in virtue of its scope, fuller of inspiration than any other. It gives us the purpose of God as regards humanity, full circle; and as we stand with the seer of Patmos gazing through the everlasting gates on the one side, and back to those far beginnings on the other, we cannot help feeling that every step of the way has been Divine. In the dim beginning—God; throughout the long veiled process—God; at the triumphant end—God. The story of Divine grace is the story of how Jehovah Elohim became known as the God of grace, and Father Lord Jesus Christ.

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My purpose just now is to expound the meaning of this last verse in the Bible. We hear it uttered in one form or another at every religious service we attend. Possibly the meaning, like the inscription of a coin, has grown dim through use and over-familiarity. Nevertheless, it is possible to recover this meaning by devout meditation, so that we may read on it the image and superscription of the King. The word *grace* is one of the most pregnant in the Bible; it represents the essence of its spirit and purpose, as the record of Revelation. No nobler title has ever been given to the Most High than the "God of grace" as revealed in Jesus Christ His Son.

I

First, let us clearly understand what this word *grace* stands for. And directly we begin to examine it, we find ourselves floating in deep waters, surrounded by beautiful sights, and filled with lovely prospects.

The New Testament word *χάρις* is derived from a Sanscrit root meaning to *shine forth*, and so to rejoice, be bright-hearted, glad. And it stands first and foremost for a certain bright, kindly disposition in the giver of a gift, as well as in the recipient thereof. It means, that is, *graciousness*, which is the overflowing of a heart filled with love. As applied to God it is related to His *goodness*, which He shows to all His creatures ("The earth is full of His loving-kindness," Psalm xxxiii. 5); to His compassion for the needy and unfortunate ("The Father of all mercies and the God of all comfort," 2 Cor.

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i. 3); to His long-suffering towards the unthankful and the evil (Rom. ix. 22): to His patience, which defers as long as possible the punishment of sin. In a word, it belongs to the circle of the Divine attributes whose everlasting centre is love; and it denotes them in an outshining, beneficent mood that enhances their meaning and beauty, as the sunshine enriches the beauty of a landscape. It is the crowning glory of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that He represents Him in this royal and overflowing disposition. He is, to all who see Him through the eyes of Jesus, the "*God of grace.*"

The next meaning of the word *grace* is the act or deed of favour in which His graciousness of heart is unfolded or expressed,—as in the words "for ye know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." But an act of grace is not merely a kindness; it is always an *undeserved* kindness, an unmerited favour. If we miss this idea, we shall miss the essence of the word—as well as of the Gospel. It means a gift to which the recipient has not only no present claim, but every claim to which has been forfeited that he may once have had. Wherever we find an act of grace, it is never a bargain (Rom. iv. 28); it is never a reward of merit (Rom. iv. 4); it is never an exchange of benefits (Rom. v. 15). What is given is freely given—of course with a view to being accepted; but never with an idea of receiving an equivalent in return. This *grace* stands in its fulness for the Gospel,—the good news of God, for His free forgiveness and redeeming love, on the one hand; or, on

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the other, it stands for Jesus Christ Himself, the "unspeakable gift" of God, whom the Father gave to the world (John iii. 16), and who gave Himself freely (Gal. i. 4); a ransom for many (Matt. xx. 28);—who is in Himself the Gospel that He preached. Here we touch the essential and distinguishing fact of Christianity, as a religion that proclaims the freedom, the universal scope, the sufficiency of the gracious love of God in Jesus Christ. Free salvation, redemption by the blood of the Cross, which typifies all that is disinterested in love, and all that is perfect in self-sacrifice—that is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is His gift to those who respond to His love.

Let us advance another step into this rich garden of meanings. Grace stands not only for a gracious will and disposition, and for an undeserved gift and manifestation of that will, but it suggests *a certain manner of bestowal*. It is inseparable from the idea of beauty. It means that not only has a kind thing been *graciously* done, but *gracefully* also. This idea of the beauty of moral qualities does not take its true place in our minds. It is clear from the merest glance at this lovely world, that God delights in beautiful things and wishes us to do so also. Why should the sunshine be so sweet to the eye? Why is the earth clothed year by year untiringly with such gorgeous vestments? Why does the wave "fold its supple roundness" on the beach with such consummate grace and music? Why such blue heavens, such bold mountains, such shimmering wastes of sea, such lavish sunset glories, such an unspeakable apocalypse of spring every year? Because it is a truth—which we

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English people have forgotten or despised too much in our race after the merely useful—that beauty is something dear to the heart of the Creator. This has been shown in numberless ways, but in its perfection only in Jesus, who never did a rude or unseemly thing, but who was full of “grace and truth,” and who did all things “beautifully” (Mark vii. 37).

II

And so, reserving a glance later on for another range of meaning of the word *grace*, we are reminded here that we must view it more particularly in its relation to Jesus Himself. It is not merely grace that is spoken of here, but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom, after breaking up the pure light in the prism of our mind, we see it all reunited again in a perfect beam.

In the strictest sense we can say that Jesus Christ is the incarnation of grace. “He was full of *grace* and truth.” He is thus the type of all grace. In Him we see it full-orbed. He makes it concrete for our vision ; He gives us a perfect picture of what would otherwise have been but a vague idea.

Think, for instance, of that wonderful *graciousness of mind and heart* that was His. There was nothing beyond the reach of His sympathies or the pale of His affection. His very enemies were not safe from that great-hearted love of His, which, like the sun, shone on the barren desert as well as the fruitful field ; and, like the rain, fell on the just and the unjust, the thankless

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and the evil. He wept over callous Jerusalem, and fickle Capernaum; He hung in silent agony over those who rejected His message; He mingled interceding prayers with the jeers and mockings of His murderers. What a love was this!

Think, too, of the "fair, fit, form," which the graciousness of Jesus took in His words and deeds. How simple, yet how profound are the truths He utters! You cannot alter a word of His discourses, even in the fragmentary form in which they have come to us, without spoiling their antithesis, their symmetry, their balance of thought; to misquote them is to maim them. No flaw can be found in His illustrations. He makes the flowers and the birds, the skies and the seasons, enforce the laws of His kingdom with such simplicity and force, that we might almost say that the lily and the sparrow, the springing corn and the sunset, were made expressly to serve as parables of the Higher Life. And the little deeds of kindness which He wrought were so graciously done, with such Divine and touching delicacy, that the world will never lose pleasure in reading them. He stoops to bless little children, and there is not a mother's heart on earth that can read the story without melting. He bends low over the abandoned sinner, and His whisper of pardon unlooses the burden of our guilt as we read. He casts a look of anguish at a forsworn disciple, and we feel our own tears mingling with Peter's over our own shameful denials, shirkings of duty, failures to live up to our ideal. He bows His head on the Cross, and honours the beloved disciple with the precious charge of His widowed mother, and

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henceforth the world's pity enfolds every widowed wife and bereaved mother as special objects for its filial sympathy. "Sorrow is sanctified, for He has wept; labour is sweet, for He has toiled; the grave is only a resting place, for He has lain therein." God has sent other teachers before and since to show the rigid path of duty, and to reveal or emphasise the eternal law of righteousness; but He sent His Son to make that way beautiful, and that law winsome. I read the maxims of the greatest thinkers, and feel that, in spite of all their force and truth, there is something dim and impersonal about them. Their light is like that of the stars, very bright, very cold, and very distant. But when I read the words of Jesus, they sound like music; the beauty of the moral law shines above me full-orbed; and yet it comes infinitely near to me, for I see it to be a part of myself, and that it is the expression of my highest self, which it is my privilege to realise through His grace in me.

It is this charm with which Christ invests goodness, truth, self-sacrifice, devotion, and all the lofty virtues which frequently constitutes the meaning of the word grace as applied to Him. But it goes deeper far than even that, embracing that gift of Himself which He made for mankind. "Who suffered for sins once, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "Have this *grace* in you which was in Christ Jesus—*i.e.*, the impulse to give yourself freely and at cost for others. There is nothing in history like the perfect giving of the Son of God for the sins of the world; nothing that has created such streams of beneficent influences through

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the centuries, and continues to-day, as it will for all days to come. The Cross of Jesus is the climax and crown of all grace ; we see it then in the utmost reach of its possibilities and its *power* ; for it conquers the world's sin—the direst enemy even of the Love and Holiness of God.

III

Yes, *its power*. What is the *power* of Christ's grace ? Its power is to inspire us with its own quality, to fill us with an adequate response to its wonderful appeal.

For there is still another group of meanings for this many-coloured, multitudinous word. It stands not only for the gracious disposition and will of God, and for the unspeakable gift of His dear Son, and for the charm and winsomeness with which He invested holiness, but it stands for the answering quality which it calls forth in those on whom it is bestowed. It is not only in the sun that shines from the sky ; it is also the flower that springs from the soil. The grace of God, I say, is a power, an influence, a conquering force, and what it does is to produce in the hearts of those who receive it an image of the God who bestows it. Love awakens love, as hate incites hate ; the grace of God reappears as grace of life in man. *Noblesse oblige*. A magnanimous act may be absolutely disinterested, and yet it is legitimately expected that it will call forth a worthy response. So we read of the "Christian graces," which are the flowerings of the Christian virtues under the cherishing warmth of the love of Christ. They are

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Christ repeating Himself in His people, as He fructifies their life at its very centre, and becomes in them "the hope of glory," bringing forth "the fruits of the Spirit."

When we consider the Perfect Life, and then remember that we are called upon to follow in His steps, our hearts fail within us, for how can we who are so frail follow one so strong, how can we the sinful attain to the snow-white purity of Him who "knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth?"

Now it is the most remarkable feature of the example of Jesus Christ that what seems in itself impossible is yet through Him attainable. The highest goodness the world has ever seen is imitable, because it is *full of grace* as well as truth. Show me such men as Moses or Paul, Savonarola or Luther, and say, "These are your models—follow them, imitate them," I am constrained to say, "Impossible! I have not their gifts, their strength, their capacity for great thoughts and purposes and deeds." But when I hear Jesus saying "Know ye what I have done unto you? . . . I have given you an example;" my heart leaps to the call, and, forgetting all my weakness, my frailty, and even my sinfulness, I say, "Yea, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." For I see the uniqueness of Jesus not only in the accomplishment of great deeds, but in the perfect doing of ordinary things; and as all of us have to be constantly doing little things, we can see that it needs only the spirit of Jesus to make these little things the channels of a noble and Divine spirit. Even the dying of Jesus was different from the dying of other

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men—for instance, of the two robbers beside whom He breathed His last—in virtue of the meaning that He put into it; and what a meaning was there! Thus we “copy Him we serve” by imbibing His gracious spirit, His love, His purity, His truth, His patience—in a word, His grace—and then acting as it prompts us. In this way the highest goodness the world has ever seen is made imitable for the lowliest and the weakest of men.

And the time will come—“is it here on our homely earth, is it worlds away?”—when the Divine purpose will be accomplished. “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness,” cries the devout heart. “He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied” when He sees His people full of His grace. For let me close where I began by saying that the great “final cause” of the creation is to produce character in its finest development. “The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the appearing of the sons of God;” and the sons of God are those who manifest the glory, that is, the grace of Christ.

Are we helping the great Saviour in the fulfilment of this world-purpose? *Is He having His way with us?* Are we giving ourselves into His shaping hands so that He may mould us, not merely in the broad outlines, but in detail, in those finer lines that make the perfect whole? It is not enough to be true, to be upright, to be humble, to be full of faith; we must have all these things in us in a special way; we must have them as Jesus had; the bloom must be on our virtues, because His life and spirit are in our hearts. So shall we be

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His *workmanship*—His “poems.” When the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ not only shines above us but makes its home within, we shall be His indeed, and we shall show forth His glory, as He showed forth His Father’s glory.

XXIII

TWELVE HOURS IN THE DAY

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?”—JOHN xi. 9.

THE imagery here is best understood from a study of the circumstances in which Jesus and His disciples were placed. He had retired to the district beyond Jordan, owing to the growing hostility of the authorities, and while there He heard of the serious illness, and subsequently of the death, of His dear friend Lazarus. As soon as the latter news reached Him, He gave utterance to His determination to return to Bethany. His disciples had been somewhat surprised that He had not suggested this when they had first heard of the sickness of Lazarus, but they were still more surprised that He should venture into useless peril now that Lazarus was dead and beyond the reach of help. “Rabbi,” they said, “the Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?” It was in answer to this remonstrance that Jesus uttered the words of my text: “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because the light is not in him.”

As though He had said: “There is plenty of time to do one’s work, but no time to lose; there is plenty of light to see one’s duty, but no light to waste; the day is ample for all we have to do, but the night lies

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beyond ; God will guard those who do their work fearlessly, faithfully, diligently, and no harm shall come to them till it is done ; but if they shirk it, and leave it till too late, there is darkness, and failure and judgment before them." This spirit of quiet diligence, of steady purpose, of trustful dependence on the Father, was the spirit of Jesus throughout His earthly life ; and in this utterance, which sheds a clear light into the inmost recesses of His mind, we have three or four suggestions of how we should look on life, and time, and the opportunity of fulfilling our duty.

I

First, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" *Here is a warning against needless hurry, and fret, and disquietude of mind in view of the shortness of life, and of the largeness of our tasks.*

We are more in need of this warning to-day than in any previous age of the world. The acceleration of modes of travel and of the processes of manufacture, which marked the last century's progress, have somehow infected the very souls of men, and filled them with a fever of unrest which involves the death of some of the most precious things that life contains. Most people are beset with the sense of the shortness of time and of the multiplicity of things they have to do. This means hurry, and scamping, and inefficiency in all directions. Nothing is done well if it is done in a hurry ; for hurry means that the mind is only half given to the work in hand. But there is a worse effect on the mind itself,

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which is thrown out of gear, and filled with disquietude and discontent, so that its powers are not under control, and a sense of helplessness and misery weighs it down. Fretful people are miserable people, and are often envious, jealous, and full of malice and distempers. Hurry means the loss of self-command, and without command of ourselves we can do nothing nobly and well.

“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” These words came out of the heart of One who might well have pleaded the vastness of His mission, and the shortness of His appointed time. There was no one who ever had a work so great, so manifold in its bearings, and which depended for its entire issue on its being done with absolute perfectness. Yet it had all to be crammed into two or three short years of public toil and ministry. Within this brief span a sinless character had to be perfected; the good news of the Gospel had to be proclaimed, expounded, enforced in a course of teaching which was to be an inexhaustible fountain of spiritual light and guidance for endless generations; mighty influences for the redemption of the world had to be set moving, and the coping-stone placed on the great vicarious sacrifice which crowned that wonderful life with a still more wonderful death. Truly, the brief ministry of our Lord was crowded as no other period of time ever was since time began, yet you will never find in the life of Jesus the slightest suggestion of hurry, or rush, or over-pressure from without. In the midst of the most strenuous doings and utterances, surrounded by clamorous crowds who had no pity, no sense of

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fitness, no kindly consideration, but who demanded all manner of benefits with endless iteration, Jesus was yet always calm, self-possessed, free from fret and hurry. With Him there was always time to do what had to be done, and His unhurried spirit never failed to meet the immediate call of the hour.

And the reason for this? It is to be found, first, in the realisation that it is not by the multiplicity of a man's activities that he is to fulfil his place in the world, but by their quality. It is to be found also in the power that comes of a perfectly poised and balanced spirit, ready for every indication of the Divine will, and keen to recognise how many are the trivial things that may be left undone, and how great and noble are the few things that must be done. So you will find a beautiful seasonableness about all our Lord's doings, an aptness as well as a scope in His lightest utterances, and all His work had that finished and complete quality which you find in a perfect work of art.

Well for us if we have something of this beautiful spirit of Jesus in our outlook on life as a whole, and on each day's task as we look forward to it! We are prone, nowadays, to look on life as a chance of doing many things. Every day must be crowded, every hour must have its task; "getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." It will be a happy day for many of us when we realise that life is largely the art of leaving many trivial and unimportant things undone. There is not time for this and that; we must choose which, and ask for grace to do only what really tells, what is useful, what is kind, what is helpful, what God means us to do. Half the

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things we agonise over might as well be left undone altogether; the rest then will fall into place. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" Pray, then, for that spacious feeling, that large and leisurely outlook, which filled the horizon of Jesus with peace and light, and enabled Him to do His work from first to last with an easy and a quiet mind, and yet with absolute mastery of His work.

II

Second, "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" "If a man walk in the day, he stumbleth not." Then there is *enough light to see our way*, and each hour has *its appropriate and seemly duty*.

The word "day" here means "life," and life's chances and choices. It is a happy phrase. Youth is the morning of this day; middle-age its noon; old age its evening. To each hour of life's day its proper task! The morning of youth is the period of dreams, and visions, and ideals brightly conceived; life's plan must now be laid out, and life's powers disciplined and made fit for their work. The noonday of maturity is the period of accomplishment; dreams must now be turned into facts, visions actualised, ideals strenuously followed, and life's purpose realised. The evening of age is the period of rest well-earned; of the pleasures of memory; of the opening vistas of the life that lies beyond the grave. This is how life should be spent, and when so spent, it is a beautiful and holy thing. It is a day of light, activity, clear-sighted performance, and so, of honoured rest at last. God give us grace so to live our lives; for

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otherwise, they will neither be beautiful, nor wise, nor honourable, nor good.

“If a man walk in the day he stumbleth not.” There is light enough for life’s tasks. Each day has its sunrise and its sunset; and though there are dark days in life as well as days of sunshine, there is never lacking the light that lightens every man that cometh into the world, and shows to him the way of life. It is true that the light of life, like the light of the sun, only shines from day to day. You cannot boast yourself of to-morrow, though you may too readily borrow its cloud and its trouble; nevertheless if you lay yourself out for knowing the will of God for you *to-day*, that will surely be revealed to you. I know that it often seems otherwise. We are shut in between two opposing alternatives of action; we know that one must be right, the other wrong; we are bound to choose one or the other; and whichever way we turn we often feel that there are cogent reasons for choosing the other. “If I only knew which of these alternatives it is right for me to take,” we say, “I should ask for no more, for I should take it. My trouble is that I cannot clearly see my way.”

Was Jesus ever troubled by this most trying of problems? There are here and there indications that even He was at times perplexed and troubled in mind as to His course; but if so, there are still clearer indications of how He solved the problem. By whatever stress of perplexity He was visited in the period of His earthly discipline, we know that He took it in prayer to His heavenly Father, and poured out His heart in uttermost fellowship with Him. And we know that

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ever and always He rose from prayer to work or ordeal with clear vision and undaunted will and a purpose that was never broken. There is no other way. Earnest, honest, wholesome prayer for guidance is the only sure source of light in the tight places of life, and I have yet to know that it has ever failed of its object. The worst of it is that many men make use of prayer as they do of the advice of their friends—not so much to get more light on their duty as to get their own way. But if we go to God in the spirit of His dear Son, we shall not walk in darkness nor stumble blindly into sorrow and perdition. He will show us the path of life, and give us strength to walk therein.

III

“But if—a man walk in the night he stumbleth.” There are “twelve hours in the day,” but the night cometh, when there is no light to see and no work that can be done. Here is a warning against *indolence and neglect*.

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day.” We are here only for a while; even as we open our eyes in the bright morning we catch glimpses in the distance of life’s shadowed evening, and with many of us the sun goes down while it is yet day. What effect ought the thought of the brevity of life to have upon us? With some, it has the effect of casting them down into depths of discouragement and apathy. “There is so little time—is it worth while trying to do anything great? Life is so uncertain—shall we not be wiser to reap its fugitive hours and gather into our barns its uncertain harvest of

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enjoyment?" Such is the wisdom of the worldling. Once more turn to the stirring words of the great Master, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." That is to say, "Time is fugitive indeed; the golden hours pass swiftly with their happy opportunities of serving God and man; let us not permit any of them to slip away in careless oblivion of their precious chances. God has sent us here to do something, to attain to something, to let ourselves flow out in helpfulness to others. Seize the moment, indeed, and extract all its marrow of satisfaction, but let that satisfaction be a worthy one—the satisfaction of knowing that we are fulfilling a heavenly mission, serving our Divine Father through our human brothers and sisters while the chance is still ours." This is the wisdom of life according to Jesus the Christ.

IV

There is here also a fourth suggestion, and it is the most important of all, both in the light it throws on the attitude of Jesus towards His work, and on our own duty in life.

"Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him."

It is as though Jesus said to His disciples: "Is it dangerous to return to Judæa, and into the midst of My bitter and mortal foes? If a man walketh in the day he stumbleth not. Why? Because his life is portioned

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out for him, and while he is doing the Father's work, no harm can befall him till his task is done. I myself will assuredly fulfil My twelve hours of life's daylight. While I am in the path of duty, in the line of My Father's will, no evil can befall Me; and when the appointed end comes, it will find Me ready. But if I try to add a thirteenth hour to My earthly day, by shirking dangerous duties, and avoiding life's perilous places, there will be no immunity from peril for Me, for I shall be walking no longer in the light, but in the darkness, where evil waits for Me, and failure."

Have you ever studied the Divine fatalism of Jesus? What do I mean by this rather startling term? This—that He was filled with the sense of absolute security and freedom from peril and death till His life-work was done, and the destined hour was come. He had come to fulfil a Divine mission, and till that was done, He knew He was safe. His enemies could not touch a hair of His head till the appointed time. "They sought therefore to take Him: and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour was not yet come." "Therefore doth the Father love Me, because I lay down My life. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." "Pilate therefore said unto Him, 'Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to release Thee, and have power to crucify Thee?' Jesus answered him, 'Thou wouldst have no power against Me, except it were given thee from above.'" Right through that outwardly troubled but inwardly calm life, there was this clear unswerving

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conviction—that while Jesus was in the way of His great mission, all the outward happenings of His life were so ordered and guarded that He could not be interfered with till it was done. There is here a great deal more than I can now pause to expound, but there is a very practical lesson that I must say a word about.

It is this—we are often prone to feel that we dare not do our duty because of some evil consequence which we fear will come upon us for so doing. It will be disadvantageous to our business. It will alienate our friends. It will imperil our occupation. It will end in disaster and perhaps ruin. And so we shrink from the straight but perilous path of duty and turn aside into pleasanter and, as we think, safer ways.

And the teaching of this verse on this point is this. It may be possible for us to prolong our lives and safeguard our lower interests by shirking the higher call, but is it worth while? You may add a thirteenth hour to the day by wandering out of the path of danger, but do you see at what cost? During the twelve appointed hours we have heavenly light to guide us—"If a man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night"—*i.e.*, if, by ignobly shirking the straight path, he prolongs his existence, it is an existence of darkness, the Divine light has vanished from his sky, and instead of reaching security, he is plunging into ever-darker depths of peril and perdition. The only life worth living in this or any other world is that lived in the light of God's favour and guidance, and that can only be in the path of duty and devotion to His will.

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When we hear people saying that they cannot live perfectly honourable, and honest, and clean, and pure lives, on the score that in a world like this "it does not pay," that they would have to forfeit too much, that the Christian ideal is too high, I always turn with relief to the thought of the soldier's calling, and note how there at least a higher standard still survives. What is a soldier's central motive? The lust of killing his fellow man? That savage lust for taking life has, thank God, largely passed out of the world, and it is a libel to attribute it to any decent man. The soldier's central motive is far nobler. It is this—a hearty willingness to do and dare anything and everything for his cause; willingness, if need be, to die for his country. You will find the typical soldier's spirit manifested not in a bayonet charge, where the one fierce thought is to slay as many of the other side as possible, but in such deeds as we have seen in such startling abundance during the recent war between Russia and Japan, where men freely undertook deadly risks in cold blood, and altogether apart from the passion and exaltation of the fighting instinct. And the answer to all casuistical pleadings for the lowering of our standard of conduct to the level of prudence and safety is to point out the paramount call of duty irrespective of all personal consequences. There is time in every life for all holy activities, for heroic faithfulness, for unswerving fidelity to the call of God; but there is no time in a good man's life for temporising, for half-heartedness, for tampering with the principles of right. If our duty involves us in sorrow, and misfortune, and apparent failure, we must

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be prepared to incur all these consequences in the spirit of those noble souls who have cheerfully accepted them as a part of the appointed lot marked out for them by their Master, and who, like Him, have bowed themselves willingly under all outward calamity in the execution of the Divine will. The lives of such men are like a fair and sunny day, which, though it may pass away in cloud and storm, gives promise of a brighter to-morrow.

Let us so live each day, that its hours may be filled with such service as shall be pleasing to God; let us live it as though it were one of many noble days to come, and yet as though it were our last—doing, saying, thinking nothing that would make us afraid of His coming before another dawned.

XXIV

THE BACKGROUND OF FAITH

“Thou shalt behold a land of far distances.”—ISAIAH xxxiii. 17.

I

IT is one of our everyday trials,—a trial that partly explains the modern passion for holidays—that life consists so largely of foreground. It is the bane of the great city that it smothers backgrounds out of view—the background of cloud and horizon, of large thought and quiet meditation, of great motives and high interests. We are imprisoned in the office, the alley, the day, the moment. So many people to see, so many things to be done, so many visits to pay, so many letters to be written, so many orders to be dispatched, so much domestic detail to be attended to,—thus is the daily routine of the majority of mankind. The best that Mr. Dick Swiveller could boast of, when trying to let his room to the little old gentleman, was that it afforded “an uninterrupted view across the street.” It is something to be able to see across the street, when you can see no farther,—but to what an anti-climax are we come to that this should be true of so many of us—a race in whose blood are hoarded the experiences of illimitable time and space—a people of hunters, warriors, adventurers, and world explorers! Is it any wonder that we all long once a year at least to leave the narrow outlook and pent-up round, that we may

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have something distant to look at, and somewhere open and ample to breathe in—a down, a moor, a beach, a snow-peak,—anywhere with scope enough for the eye to revel in a horizon-line, and for the mind to occupy itself with large things, and the soul, whose home is eternity, to remind itself of its origin and destiny? Probably, if the inner mind of the most commonplace people, with no poetry and little romance left in them, could be thoroughly investigated, we should find that this is the benefit for which they unconsciously search and which they find in their annual excursions to the sea or the country. Life must have a background as well as a foreground. We all long for the country of far distances, of great spaces, and wide horizons—something ample and large, in which the mere beginning and end of things are lost in a sense of their wholeness and immensity.

The truth which I here wish to expound is this—that religion is a matter of background as well as foreground,—that it derives a part of its charm and power over us because it provides an adequate horizon for the soul, because it has in it scope as well as direction, mystery as well as fact, breadth as well as intensity. Sometimes we magnify the Gospel of Jesus Christ because it is a refuge from present distress, a sanctuary from the storm and stress of immediate temptation and sorrow, a satisfaction of the spiritual hunger of the hour. Let us not forget that it is also a watch-tower, a mount of vision, a vantage-ground, from which we are able to look at life, at the Universe, at God the all-containing Spirit, in all their inspiring greatness and satisfying fulness.

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Perhaps this aspect of the faith is one we are apt to forget in these days of utilitarian ideals, when men are so lost in the detail of the moment and the issues of a day, and it will be well for us to dwell on it for a little while.

The backgrounds of faith, then, is the subject I propose here to deal with.

II

Let me first speak of that background of the inner life which lies behind the visible and obvious—that which we see of one another in ordinary life.

How deeply conscious we are of this inner background in our quiet moments, and yet how easy it is to ignore and forget it in the rush of life! What we see and know of one another is but the foreground of the real man and woman, who is hidden behind many a barricade of secrecy and silence from the casual glance, or even the peering and curious eye. Far within us there are depths of incommunicable feeling, and hazy thought, and dim but potent life, which even our own consciousness cannot penetrate, and which certainly we cannot share with others voluntarily. Out of these depths emerge the loves and hatreds, the heroisms and crimes of life; on those dim tablelands rise the fountains of determining motives and the mysterious currents of will; there is the secret laboratory in which our temperament, our individuality is compounded, and where the glory or shame of our soul-vesture is woven.

And this inner background is the very home and native land of religion. If it does not lay hold of us

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there, in the deeps and heights of being, it avails little that it should control us in the foreground and on the surface of conduct. Where motives lie, and intentions come to birth, and the guiding principles of life take root—there is the proper sphere of religion. And this is what Jesus means when He announces the necessity of regeneration, and insists on the birth from above as the beginning of all things. “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” It is not enough to take an *impression* of God, a veneer of spiritual improvement; we must be seized in the mysteries of our being, “renewed in the spirit of our mind,” “strengthened with might in the inner man,” and so changed within that every outgoing of our life is coloured and saturated with a Divine quality. It is characteristic of Christianity that it rescued this prime truth from oblivion or obscurity, and planted it firmly as the foundation of its teaching. The foreground of life can never be fair and beautiful if, in this background of the soul, the stream of a purified and redeemed life does not flow.

III

We have spoken of the inner background of the soul. This brings me to speak of the wider background of mystery which lies behind all visible, material, temporal things.

According to the too common view the visible universe is the real thing, and the invisible is a mere inference of the reason, and possibly a figment of the imagination. According to a deeper philosophy, on the other hand,

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everything visible is a mere phantasm, a phenomenon, an appearance; it is the invisible beneath and behind that is alone real. According to faith these two views are co-ordinated in the thought that the visible derives such reality as it possesses, in virtue of being the outcome and issue of the mystery behind it, which is not a bald and impenetrable something—but the great Eternal Spirit, whose Being is unspeakably rich and full. It is well in an age of material aims and agnostic science to remember this, and to feed our hearts on the thought. Whenever I desire an adequate expression of the spiritual value and quality which flow from this spiritual background and give dignity to life and to things, I turn to Emerson's wonderful essay on the "Oversoul." There the essence, the breath of it, are caught and imprisoned like a perfume. "Man," he says, "is a stream whose source is hidden. Our being is descending on us we know not whence. . . . I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher source for events than the will I call mine. . . . We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within us is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the Eternal One. . . . We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree: but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul."

"Of this pure nature," he continues, "every man is at some time sensible. Language cannot paint it with its colours. It is too subtle. It is indefinable, immeasurable, but we know that it pervades us, and

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contains us. We know that all spiritual being is in man. A wise old proverb says: 'God comes to us without bell'; that is, as there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God. Justice we see, and know, Love, Freedom, Power."

Poets, seers, philosophers, mystics, prophets—these are the men who bring us into fellowship with this spiritual side of Nature, and lead us by the hand to the spot where the vision of it bursts upon us, and fills us with its joy and peace. And how great are the moments when the mystery behind Nature speaks to us with power! It may be in a casual walk on the mountainside, or along the shore of the "multitudinous sounding sea"; or it may be a word dropped in conversation, a scattering thought struck like a spark by a sentence in a book,—that quickens in us a sense of the glory and spell of this mystery in Nature; however it may be, it is a benefit not to be purchased by gold. The deep within calls to the deep without; and we feel that we are nothing, but the Divine light and love are all.

IV

Shall I speak next of that *background of great common experience* in the race which reinforces and interprets the experience of the individual in things spiritual and Divine?

We rightly emphasise the fact that religion is a very

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personal thing ; that it is something that concerns a man and his Maker alone ; and that we do not here need or wish the interference of third parties. And yet how small a part of the rich landscape of our personal religion is included within the narrow limits of our individual experience ! If religion is a very personal thing, it is also a very social thing. We look forth from our little island of faith and see, beyond, the continent of that faith which others share with us. As the Isle of Wight shelters itself from the stormy north beneath the mainland, so does a man's religion need the support, and feel the reinforcement, of the faith of his fellows. If we were condemned to know nothing, to feel nothing, of the scope, and power, and steady influence of the faith of the races, would our own uncertain intuitions of God, and immortality, and duty, be anything more than a vague surprise, a dim Perhaps ? I doubt it. But religion has come down to us from far ages, like a broadening river flowing through a great, populous land, to which every hill and mountain-range has contributed its streamlet to enrich the current, and so we to-day are buoyed up on mighty waters, and borne along irresistibly as on a flood. I look beyond my small but authentic experience of the Divine mercy and love ; and I see, first, the souls of those around me respond to their appeal and strengthened by their power ; further back, I recognise that my immediate forbears were men and women who placed their trust in God, and who were never put to confusion, and then beyond, I behold generations of saintly lives stretching in crowded succession back into the dim and distant ages, all in personal

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touch with the same realities of redemption, and each contributing something to the interpretation, the wealth, the reinforcement of the great historic faith which has come down to us enriched by this long trial, and testing, and experience.

What impulse, what power, what gracious encouragement lies in this glorious background of human experience in the things of God as it appeals to the wavering eye of our own faith! How it quickens our stagnant blood to a warmer pulse! How it strengthens our will and makes firm our step as we tread the difficult path of duty, to find it not a faint, uncertain track, but a beaten highway, along which the wise, the good, the noble, have marched from the beginnings of time! We sometimes envy those who were privileged to behold the very face of Christ, and to hear His voice, and to put their fingers into the print of the nails, and their hand into His wounded side. Do we realise how much better off we are than they were? To them, how much was uncertain that to us is plain; how much was dim that to us is clear; how much was a "perhaps" which to us, in the light of 2,000 years of trial, is an assured certainty. Even they had to fall back on the background of the past in order to reinforce their faith and to co-ordinate their own uncertainty with the witness of the ages. "The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob hath glorified His Son Jesus"—so Peter appealed to his fellow-countrymen when he started his apostolic work. The writer to the Hebrews, in encouraging the early believers in their wavering faith under the first shock of persecution, draws a moving picture of the

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glorious company of martyrs, whose story made the past vocal with a clarion-cry to faithfulness even unto blood. It was a splendid vision that he conjured up. But how faint and far compared with what is ours! For we, too, have Abraham and Isaac, and Moses, and Isaiah, and all the holy prophets and witnesses of the old golden time; but we also have Jesus, the well-beloved Son, who revealed the Father, and Paul and the other apostles, and Origen and Augustine, and Francis of Assisi and Savonarola and Dante, and Luther and Wesley, and the innumerable company of the faithful, whose witness and whose succession has never failed. When we are oppressed by the materialism and godlessness of the foreground in which our little lives are imprisoned, let us lift our eyes to these hills, whence cometh our strength. So will the temple of our faith be buttressed up and the flame of our devotion will glow again, and we shall be strengthened to pass on the sacred fire undimmed to coming generations, so uniting past and future with gold chains about the feet of God!

V

Again, we are called by the Christian faith to put ourselves under the sway of *high and glorious ideals, which rise up in the background of the soul like great alluring snow-peaks.*

The motives and the ends that find their sanction in the circumstances of the hour are anything but ennobling in their influence; they tend on the whole to

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the impoverishing of the soul. And yet how much of our lives is spent in their pursuit! The pleasures, the utilities, the pressures of the moment, how they weary and yet dominate our thoughts; how small and mean and cage-bound they make us feel! It is one of the supreme benefits of faith that it emancipates us from the thralldom of these things, sets our feet on a broad place, and fixes our eyes on far-away but all-commanding ideals. To the world at large these are as unsubstantial and visionary as those turrets and pinnacles of glory that are woven by the sun out of the mists of sunset; but they have this quality, that when they are pursued with steady trust and a steadfast will, they are recognised to be solid and mountainous realities. The man who has not learnt the secret of working for ends that rise from beyond the horizon of his own brief span of life, and whose purpose does not include eternity as well as time within its scope, has not yet tasted of the blessedness of life, and knows nothing of its dignity and beauty. The blessed souls are those who, like Abraham, are ready to leave the tyrannous interests of the hour and go forth "seeking a country," not knowing whither they fare, knowing only that it is the will of God that they should go; or who, like Moses, choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; or who are like Jesus, who pleased not Himself, but was obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross, despising the shame, for the distant glory that was set before Him. There is nothing that reveals the quality of our lives so well as this—our capacity for turning ideal ends into practical

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motives. This is the burden of Browning's great poem, "A Grammarian's Funeral":—

"That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This throws himself on God, and unperplexed,
Seeking, shall find him. . . .
Here—here's His place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects
Living and dying.

VI

And now we will lift our eyes once more to that farthest horizon line which greets us as the last background of our faith—the *Eternity that enfolds life and time*, girdling the distance with light and splendour.

It is faith alone that reveals to us this country of far distances—this land that is very far off. Immortality to science may be an irrelevance, and to philosophy a mere postulate; to religion it is a promise and an amen. Out from the gates of sunrise a winnowing wind has blown, and scattered the mists, and parted the clouds, and we see—what? The gates of a golden city of light,

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into which "there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh an abomination, nor maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." There are treasured the souls of God's elect, who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, who have been sanctified and perfected by His grace in this mortal life, and so have won an inheritance in the heavens, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. There are our beloved, who have gone before, and are waiting for us in perfect peace and a great expectancy. And thither, also, are we bound if we are faithful unto the end. There is a crown laid up for each of us, laurels that we alone can wear, the hidden manna, and the white stone, on which is written a new name, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more . . . but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant."

I commend these thoughts on the great backgrounds of the religious life, and the duty that follows from what has been said. If you would

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live a full, worthy, balanced life in the spirit, do not permit your soul to be imprisoned in the interests of the day and the hour; do not circumscribe your vision to the immediate surroundings of your life; do not allow the material pressures of the outward world to cramp and stifle your freeborn spirit. You are made for large outlooks, for the wider life of the race, for the uplifting, inspiring prospects of the "land of far distances." See that you live as though conscious that you are a citizen of no mean city; that this little life here is not all; but that beyond the veil of flesh and the hills of time you have God and immortality and heaven for your everlasting portion. Then

" Let the shadows fall,
For this life is not all ! "

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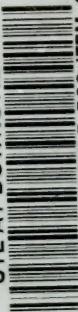
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